

**POLICY STATEMENT THE SAFE STORAGE OF
FIREARM EQUIPMENT TO PREVENT
UNINTENTIONAL FIREARM INJURIES:
ASK Campaign**

BACKGROUND:

“When two children (aged fourteen or younger) per year died from being locked in automobile trunks in the mid-1990’s, car manufacturers added safety latches to the trunks’ interiors. Yet in the same period, when some 150 children the same age died each year from unintentional firearm deaths, manufacturers did virtually nothing to make their guns safer.”¹

To reduce the number and severity of injuries, prevention activities must focus on the type of injury-drowning, fall, fire or burn, firearm, or motor vehicle .² The very first goal to preventing firearm injuries is public awareness of the issue and the second goal is to educate the public on safe firearm storage in homes.

According to National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), CDC, NCHS, nineteen percent of the population lived in homes with loaded and unlocked firearms in 1998.³

In the state of Illinois during 2003 1,108 persons were killed with a firearm in Illinois.⁴

In 2000, Winnebago County Emergency Medical Services for 42 traumas, 32 were due to shootings. All were intentional firearm injuries.⁵ Current reporting systems do not mandate the type of firearm and local unintentional firearm injury data is very difficult to get.

LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES:

The Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) through the Violence Prevention Collaborative provides various public awareness campaigns to prevent violence in families and in the community. Training opportunities for social service professionals have been offered in the community on child abuse, elder abuse, youth violence and partner abuse and in each area, firearm injuries have occurred.

In addition the WCHD has worked collaboratively with the 17th Circuit Court Family Violence Coordinating Council, the Winnebago County Sheriff Department, Rockford Police Department, University of Illinois College of Medicine’s Health Systems Research, Rockford Regional Health Council, Rockford Public School District # 205, Winnebago County State Attorney Office, Illinois Coalition for Community Services, CeaseFire Rockford and the American Red Cross to further the prevention of firearm

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injuries by offering gun locks, preventing bullying, training youth in conflict mediation, court programs to assist victims of domestic violence and toy gun buy-backs.

WHAT IS NEEDED?

- ☒ Support public awareness by partnering with the “ASK Campaign” in Rockford.
- ☒ Teaching children and adults about gun safety.
- ☒ Winnebago County Health Department’s Violence Prevention Collaborative should be charged with promoting the changing of social norms, behaviors and attitudes on the preventable nature of unintentional firearm injuries.
- ☒ The Violence Prevention Collaborative should be supported in its efforts to reduce firearm injuries.
- ☒ Promote firearm injuries as a health issue, not a gun issue, through public awareness and education.
- ☒ Develop a health care provider’s advocacy group on firearms injuries and safety issues.
- ☒ Train Emergency Department staff on ways to prevent violence.
- ☒ Track firearm related injuries and report periodically to the community.
- ☒ Refine data gathering methods and data availability at the local and state level.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT:

- ☒ Families owning guns number four out of ten.
- ☒ Safe storage of guns can be improved.
- ☒ Lack of gun lock and trigger lock use by gun owners.
- ☒ More unintentional deaths and injuries occur with youth ages 0 to 19 because of the lack of secured and locked firearms.⁶
- ☒ Because high school age youth report easy access to guns.⁷
- ☒ Youth in Rockford identified that it was easy to get handguns⁸
- ☒ When asked if youth had carried a gun, knife or club in the past 30 days 5% of the 8th and 10th graders stated yes.⁸

The Violence Prevention Collaborative (VPC) would like to further their work in violence prevention and do firearm injury prevention. VPC requests the Winnebago County Health Department’s Board of Health to support these actions.

The Public Health approach has been successful in preventing epidemics, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use. It has now had success with firearm injuries and preventing gun violence.

The ASK Campaign is an opportunity to begin applying unintentional injury prevention principles locally.

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1. Hemenway, David. Private Guns, Public Health. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. 2004.
2. U.S. DHHS, Healthy People, Washington DC, January 2000 p 15-7.
3. U.S. DHHS, Healthy People, Washington DC, January 2000 p 15-15.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2003
5. EMS data reporting system. 2000
6. Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine, August 1999.
7. Teenage Research Unlimited, June 2003
8. 2004 Illinois Youth Survey, Rockford Public School District # 205