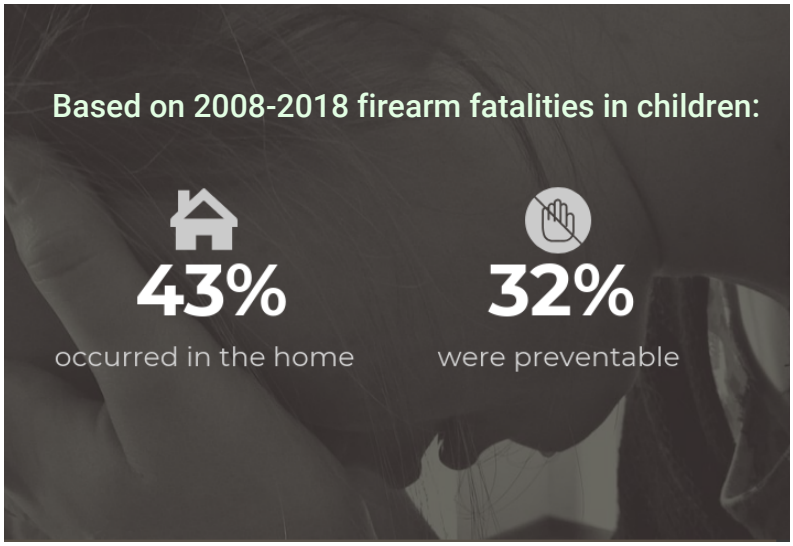
Firearm-related Deaths: CDR

Nationally, firearm-related deaths are the third leading cause of death in children between the ages of 1 and 17 years, and the second leading cause of injury-related deaths. (3) Seven deaths reviewed by the CDR panel in 2018 were caused by the use of firearms. One death was a suicide, and six were homicides.

Due to Delaware's relatively small population size and the small numbers of firearm fatalities each year, data from 2008 to 2018 was analyzed together. Over this time, the 28 firearm deaths were reviewed that occurred among Delaware children. Twelve deaths (43%) occurred in the child's home, and 77% involved the use of a handgun. Over this time period, the CDR panel determined that nine deaths (32%) were preventable, meaning that if the child or someone nearby did not have access to a loaded firearm, the death would not have occurred. (Figure 3) In two-thirds of preventable cases, the firearm was stored loaded, and in that same proportion the gun was owned by a parent. (Figure 4, next page) In one-third of preventable cases, the child was playing with the gun. In one case, the gun owner was charged as result of the death. Based on national statistics compiled by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Center for Injury Research and Prevention: about 1 in 3 handguns is stored loaded and unlocked. Over 75% of 1st and 2nd graders know where their parents keep their guns and 36% admitted handling the weapon, contrary to their parents' report. (4)



Four of the nine preventable firearm deaths were suicides. National statistics indicate that the use of a firearm in a suicide attempt is fatal 75% of the time, much higher than other methods of self-harm. Teen suicides are often impulsive, with some studies indicating that many teens spend 10 minutes or less deciding on their action. A highly lethal method of injury at the time of crisis is a crucial factor in whether a suicide attempt will become fatal. (3)

Figure 3: Preventability as determined by the CDR panel in 2008-2018 child firearm fatalities

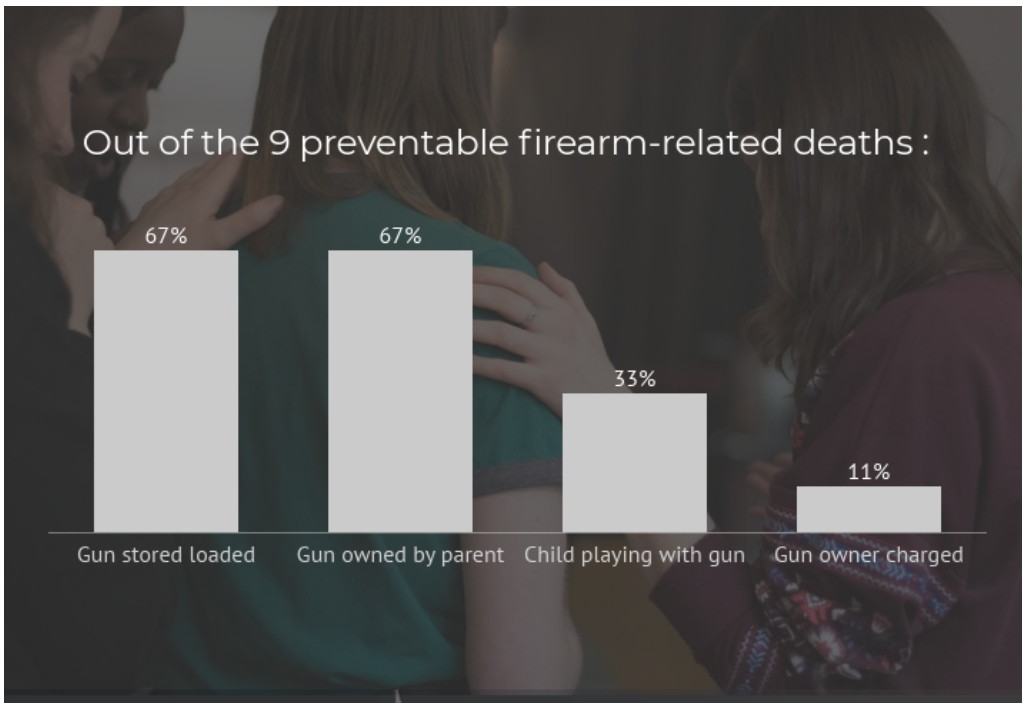


Figure 4: Findings of the CDR Panel in the nine cases of preventable firearm-related fatalities

"The absence of guns from children's homes and communities is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent firearm-related injuries in children and adolescents. Adolescent suicide risk is strongly associated with firearm availability. Safe gun storage (guns unloaded and locked, ammunition locked separately) reduces children's risk of injury. Physician counseling of parents about firearm safety appears to be effective, but firearm safety education programs directed at children are ineffective."

--American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement
Pediatrics 2012, Vol 130/Issue 55

(3) Fowler KA, et al. Childhood firearm injuries in the United States. Pediatrics 2017; 140(1): e20163486.
(4) Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute. Gun violence: facts and statistics. Updated May 2018. Available at: https://injury.research.chop.edu/violence-prevention-initiative/types-violence-involving-youth/gun-violence/gun-violence-facts-and#.XMO59GhKjIU .