

Behavioral Responses to the Threat of Firearm Violence Among Colorado Adults



Tiffany E. Maksimuk, BA,^{1,2} Erin Wright-Kelly, DrPH, MA,^{1,3} Kate Little, BA,^{1,3}
Joseph A. Simonetti, MD, MPH^{1,2,3,4}

Introduction: Research examining the association between concerns about firearm injury and Americans' behaviors is limited. The aim of this study was to describe the prevalence of self-reported behavioral responses to fear of firearm injury among Colorado adults.

Methods: Data are from the 2023 Colorado Firearm Injury Prevention Survey (N=1,517 adults included; data analyzed 2025). The primary outcome was engagement in any of 11 behavioral responses assessed using an item modified from the Kaiser Family Foundation Survey: *Have you done any of the following to protect yourself or your family from the possibility of firearm-related violence?* Behaviors were categorized into avoidance, communication, or firearm related. Weighted proportions and 95% CIs are reported. Survey weights account for nonresponse and ensure that findings are representative of Colorado adults.

Results: Among Colorado adults, 64.5% (95% CI=61.0%, 67.8%) reported engagement in at least 1 behavioral response; 40.8% (95% CI=37.4%, 44.4%) reported an avoidance behavior, 35.4% (95% CI=32.0%, 38.9%) reported a communication behavior, and 27.9% (95% CI=24.7%, 31.4%) reported a firearm behavior. Those who reported any changes were significantly more likely to identify as female or Hispanic, have children in the household, reside in a household with a firearm, and have experienced violence and were more likely to have reported concerns about firearm violence in their community and violence impacting themselves or their family than those who reported no changes.

Conclusions: A majority of Colorado adults report having changed their behaviors in response to the threat of firearm violence. Further work is needed to understand the broad impact of these behavior changes on the Colorado populace.

Am J Prev Med 2026;70(1):108126. © 2025 Elsevier Inc. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death of youth aged 0–19 years in the U.S.,¹ and more than 28,500 adults died because of firearm injuries.² Most existing research on firearm injury focuses on fatalities and, to a lesser extent, non-fatal injuries and the overall societal economic burden of firearm injuries.^{3–6} However, there are other important consequences to consider when attempting to account for the impact of firearm injuries in the U.S. For example, the endemic threat of firearm injury in the U.S. has important psychological impacts on Americans.^{7–9} The common experience of firearm violence, for example, through personal or media exposure, has

become a significant stressor among Americans, particularly youth.^{10,11} This may have resulted in important shifts in how Americans navigate their daily lives,

From the ¹Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative, School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, Colorado; ²School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, Colorado; ³Injury and Violence Prevention Center, Colorado School of Public Health, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, Colorado; and ⁴Division of Hospital Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, Colorado

Address correspondence to: Joseph Simonetti, MD, MPH, Division of Hospital Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz School of Medicine, 12401 East 17th Avenue, Aurora CO 80045. E-mail: joseph.simonetti@cuanschutz.edu.

0749-3797/\$36.00

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2025.108126>