

Understanding Violent Death Data

The role of coroners and medical examiners

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) links details of violent deaths and suicides—the who, when, where, and how—to better understand why they occurred. NVDRS relies on information from coroner and medical examiner reports (including toxicology), law enforcement reports, and death certificates to monitor and characterize violent deaths and suicides. NVDRS is the only state- and jurisdiction-based online reporting system that combines data on violent deaths, suicides, and their circumstances from multiple sources into one anonymous database.

Critical Partnership

Coroner/medical examiner data are critical to the success and use of NVDRS and help make NVDRS the most comprehensive data system in the U.S. on violent deaths and suicides. Decision-makers and program planners can use NVDRS data to develop and tailor violence and suicide prevention efforts.

NVDRS collects data on:



Suicides



Homicides



Deaths of undetermined intent that may have been due to violence



Legal intervention deaths (excluding executions)



Unintentional firearm-related deaths

Why we collect information on deaths of undetermined intent and unintentional firearm deaths:



More complete and accurate data

To provide a more complete and accurate picture of these deaths nationwide



Understand circumstances & factors

To better understand circumstances and contributing factors surrounding these deaths



Examine unique factors

To allow for examination of the unique factors that result in an undetermined classification of manner of death



Inform & strengthen prevention

To inform and strengthen prevention strategies by identifying patterns, risks, and opportunities for prevention

Types of data collected

Trained abstractors in states and jurisdictions enter de-identified information into a secure, encrypted NVDRS database in accordance with standardized CDC protocols. NVDRS captures data on decedents of all ages and includes more than 700 unique data elements, including:



Injury characteristics (e.g., cause of death, type of location where injured)



Demographics (e.g., sex, race/ethnicity)



Circumstances that preceded or were related to a victim's death



Mental health history, including known diagnoses



Toxicology (drugs or substances in the victim's system)



Narratives that provide a brief summary of the incident based on coroner/medical examiner and law enforcement reports

The role of coroners and medical examiners in NVDRS and how NVDRS data can support medicolegal death investigation work

Coroners and medical examiners (C/ME) are essential partners in NVDRS. Their contributions provide critical, detailed information that is often not available from other sources and are foundational to understanding violent deaths and suicides.

C/ME data in NVDRS includes:

-  Cause and manner of death.
-  Injury characteristics.
-  Toxicology findings.
-  Relevant medical and mental health information.

C/ME contributions enable NVDRS to:

-  Characterize the circumstances surrounding violent deaths and suicides.
-  Identify patterns and trends in injury and mortality.
-  Create a more complete, multi-source picture of violent deaths.

NVDRS data informed by C/ME reports help:

- Identify key risk factors and contributing circumstances.
- Detect emerging trends at local, state, and national levels.
- Support development of targeted, evidence-based prevention strategies.

This data can also support C/ME and partner efforts by:

- Informing public health responses.
- Highlighting opportunities for prevention.
- Supporting cross-sector collaboration.

More complete and detailed C/ME reporting enhances the quality and utility of NVDRS data, helping communities take more effective action to prevent future violent deaths.

Data protection, confidentiality, and responsible use

NVDRS is designed with strong safeguards to protect sensitive information and maintain the trust of data partners, including coroners and medical examiners. Since NVDRS data collection began in 2003, there have been no reported data breaches or compromises to system security.

Data are entered into a secure, encrypted system that meets federal security standards. NVDRS does not collect personally identifiable information. Data are used in aggregate to understand trends—not to identify individuals or specific cases.

Importantly, NVDRS data are used solely for public health surveillance and prevention—not for medicolegal determinations, enforcement, or investigative purposes. Protections that apply to other public health data systems, such as communicable disease records, also apply to NVDRS.

By contributing to NVDRS, coroners and medical examiners can be confident that their data are protected and used responsibly to support local, state, and national prevention efforts.



For more information on NVDRS, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nvdrs/about/index.html>