

Understanding Violent Death Data

The role of law enforcement

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 uses information from law enforcement reports, death certificates, and coroner and medical examiner reports (including toxicology) 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.

Law Enforcement Contributions

Law enforcement data are critical to the success and use of NVDRS and helps make NVDRS the most comprehensive data system in the U.S. on homicides, suicides, and other violent deaths. 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 examine 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 law enforcement in NVDRS and how NVDRS data can support law enforcement work

Law enforcement agencies are essential partners in NVDRS. Their contributions provide critical, detailed information from the violent deaths and suicides they investigate. These frontline insights help ensure that the data accurately reflect the circumstances surrounding each case. In turn, NVDRS data can be used to generate deeper understanding of the factors contributing to violent deaths and suicides, helping identify trends and inform strategies that can support prevention efforts and enhance public safety.

By partnering with law enforcement, NVDRS turns frontline insights into actionable data that supports decision-making. This collaboration helps agencies prioritize public safety resources, more effectively deploy law enforcement, and better understand crime circumstances. In turn, these insights can support community-based prevention and education efforts. Ultimately, the goal of NVDRS is to help build healthier, safer communities. NVDRS can also:



Identify emerging issues related to violent deaths and suicides in a timely manner



Detect geographic patterns, including areas with higher concentrations of violent deaths



Provide data-driven insights to guide and refine state and local violence and suicide prevention initiatives

Data protection, confidentiality, and responsible use

NVDRS includes strong safeguards to protect sensitive information and maintain the trust of data partners, including law enforcement. 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 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, law enforcement agencies 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>