

# Alcohol, firearms, and suicide among youth: temporal trends in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1960 to 1983.

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# Alcohol, Firearms, and Suicide Among Youth

## Temporal Trends in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1960 to 1983

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## Abstract

The death certificates and coroners' reports for all suicides, undetermined causes of death, and questionable accidents were obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Vital Statistics for 10- to 19-year-old residents of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, from 1960 to 1983. During the 24-year study period, 159 cases of definite suicide and 38 cases of likely suicide were noted. The suicide rate increased markedly among youth during the study period, particularly among

white males aged 15 to 19 years, and was not due to changes in classification procedures over time. The suicide rate by firearms increased much faster than the suicide rate by other methods (2.5- vs 1.7-fold). The proportion of suicide victims who had detectable blood alcohol levels rose 3.6-fold from 12.9% in 1968 to 1972 to 46.0% in 1978 to 1983. Suicide victims who used firearms were 4.9 times more likely to have been drinking than were those who used other methods of suicide. The availability of firearms and the increased use of alcohol among youth may have made a significant contribution to the increase in the suicide rate among the young.

(*JAMA* 1987;257:3369-3372)

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