



## COMMUNITIES THAT CARE REDUCES RURAL ADOLESCENT HANDGUN CARRYING

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### MISSION OF SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- Conduct research on factors that influence development
- Develop and test the effectiveness of interventions
- Study service systems and work to improve them
- Advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems
- Disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research

## FIREARM INJURIES AND RURAL ADOLESCENTS

Firearm injuries are the leading cause of death for children age 1–19 in the United States, with more than 4,000 fatalities reported annually for adolescents age 11–19. Prior studies in urban settings have shown that adolescents who carry handguns are more likely to be both involved in and victims of violent behaviors and are more likely to report suicidal ideation and attempt suicide. In rural communities, handgun carrying for sporting and recreational purposes is more common than in urban communities; recent studies in rural communities have shown, however, that adolescents who carry handguns in those settings are at a greater risk of victimization and perpetration than those who do not. In addition, the rates of suicide by handgun are also higher in rural communities than in urban communities.

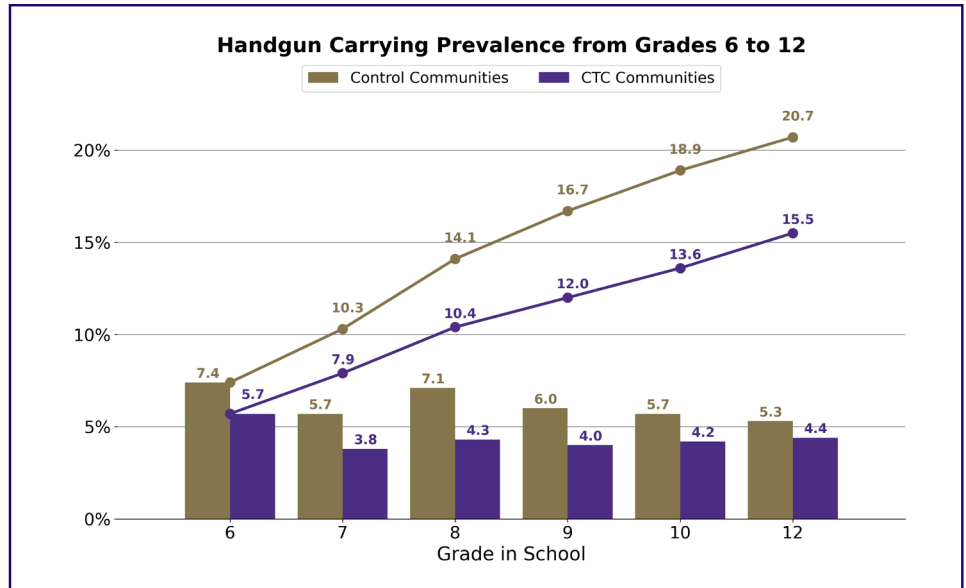
## COMMUNITIES THAT CARE: AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR ADDRESSING HANDGUN CARRYING IN ADOLESCENTS

Tested and effective programs to reduce handgun carrying in adolescents are rare, but prevention systems such as Communities That Care (CTC) appear promising, especially in rural areas. The CTC system works by supporting young people across entire communities, preventing problem behaviors

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that are commonly observed in adolescence. With CTC training and support, community coalitions use data from local youth to guide the selection of tested and effective prevention programs that reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors in communities.

Programs include family-focused programs, school-based programs, and community-based programs. To date, rural communities that have implemented the CTC system have reduced many problem behaviors in adolescents, including substance use and violent behaviors, [reductions continuing into young adulthood](#).



**Figure 1** Gold and purple bars show past-year use: in every grade between 6 and 12, youth from communities using the CTC system reported less handgun carrying in the past year than youth from control communities.

The gold and purple lines show lifetime use, which was lower in CTC communities.

## REDUCED ADOLESCENT HANDGUN CARRYING IN CTC COMMUNITIES

Researchers at SDRG examined whether the prevention benefits of the CTC system extend to handgun carrying. Using longitudinal data from the Community Youth Development Study for youth from Grades 6 through 12, they compared rates of adolescent handgun carrying during these school years between rural communities using the CTC system and control communities not using this system. Across Grades 6 through 12, youth in CTC communities were about 27% less likely to report carrying a handgun than youth in control communities. The largest differences in past-year handgun carrying were seen in Grades 7, 8, and 9—the key years in which prevention programs were offered—but effects continued through Grade 12. Between Grades 6 and 12, only 15.5% of CTC youth had ever carried a handgun, compared with 20.7% of control group youth.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION OF FIREARM INJURIES

The CTC prevention system shows promise for reducing the rising burden of firearm fatalities by lowering rates of handgun carrying up to 7 years after the system was first put into place. The success of this system suggests that a community-wide approach to intervening on risk and protective factors early in adolescence can decrease high-risk firearm behaviors.

### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC, PLEASE REFER TO THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE:

Rowhani-Rahbar, A., Oesterle, S., Gause, E. L., Kuklinski, M. R., Ellyson, A. M., Schleimer, J. P., Dalve, K., Weybright, E. H., Briney, J. S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2023). Effect of the Communities That Care prevention system on adolescent handgun carrying: A cluster-randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(4), e236699. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.6699>

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