



# Understanding Violent Deaths in California

Violence takes the lives of nearly 6,000 Californians each year. In 2009, California had 3,743 suicides and 2,055 homicides (see Table 1 below). These deaths are tragic and largely preventable, and they are also costly. One estimate pegs the cost at \$70 billion annually in the United States – a figure that rivals federal education spending or the damage done by hurricane Katrina<sup>1</sup>. Often, the public foots the bill for treating these injuries.<sup>2</sup> Yet, California does not have a systematic, comprehensive statewide data system to help understand the risk factors of violence and inform policies to reduce the incidence of violence.

**Table 1 – Top 5 Causes of Injury Death in California, 2009**

Rank	Cause Of Injury	Number of Injuries	Rate/100,000
1	Suicide/Self-Inflicted	3,743	9.7
2	Unintentional - Poisoning	3,561	9.2
3	Homicide/Assault	2,055	5.3
4	Unintentional - Fall	2,048	5.3
5	Unintentional – Motor Vehicle Traffic, Unspecified	1,129	2.9

Source: CDPH Vital Statistics Death Statistical Master Files. Prepared by: California Department of Public Health, Safe and Active Communities Branch. Report generated from <http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov> on: June 10, 2011.

(CalEVDRS). This system builds on already existing data sources – death certificates, coroner records, and Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) – combining them to address a wide variety of questions to better inform homicide- and suicide-prevention efforts. This level of detail makes it easier to identify homicide-suicides and other multiple victim incidents, as well as legal intervention homicides committed by law enforcement officers in the line of duty. CalEVDRS data also provide information on patterns of gang homicides, circumstances of youth homicides, factors in domestic violence-related homicides or suicides, veteran suicides, and suicides of youth with nontraditional sexual identity. Toxicology results are collected to learn the role of different drugs in violent deaths.

CalEVDRS is both detailed and efficient. It utilizes CDPH’s web-based electronic death registration system (CA-EDRS). Coroners use this online system to submit death certificates and supplemental information on violent deaths, rather than mailing paper copies to the state. This allows the state to report these data much sooner than was previously possible.

## CALEVDRS

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has developed a data-rich, efficient mechanism for tracking and learning about violent deaths in the state – California’s Electronic Violent Death Reporting System

## SCOPE OF CALEVDRS

In 2007, CalEVDRS began with five counties. Currently, 14 counties participate.

These counties accounted for 58 percent of the 2009 population and approximately 60 percent

of the violent deaths in California each year – 70 percent of homicides and 52 percent of suicides.

**CalEVDERS Participating Counties**

<b>A</b>	Alameda	<b>H</b>	San Joaquin
<b>B</b>	Kern	<b>I</b>	San Mateo
<b>C</b>	Los Angeles	<b>J</b>	Santa Clara
<b>D</b>	Monterey	<b>K</b>	Shasta
<b>E</b>	Riverside	<b>L</b>	Solano
<b>F</b>	Sacramento	<b>M</b>	Stanislaus
<b>G</b>	San Francisco	<b>N</b>	Yolo



- » Toxicology reports
- » Hate crime, Terrorism
- » Gang-related, Drive-by shooting, Drug involvement
- » Police involvement, Self-defense, Whether victim used a weapon

For suicides, the following information is abstracted from coroner reports:

- » Mental health problem/treatment
- » Drug problem/Alcohol problem
- » Intimate-partner problem/Other relationship problem
- » Recent death of friend or family member
- » Job problem/Financial problem
- » Legal problem
- » Physical health problem
- » Suicide history/Disclosed intent

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

CalEVDERS is a partnership between the California Department of Public Health and the California Research Bureau, mostly funded by The California Wellness Foundation. CalEVDERS data can be accessed online at EpiCenter, CDPH’s online query web site for California injury data (<http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov>). For more information about CalEVDERS, please contact [SAC@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:SAC@cdph.ca.gov).

**INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM CALEVDERS**

For homicides, in addition to victim demographics and cause of death from the death certificate, CalEVDERS gleans the following information from coroner reports and Supplementary Homicide Reports:

- » Victim/suspect relationship
- » Precipitating crime
- » Weapon detail
- » Intimate-partner violence

**ENDNOTES**

1 Phaedra S. Corso, et al. “Medical Costs and Productivity Losses Due to Interpersonal and Self-Directed Violence in the United States.” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 32:6 (June 2007): 474-482.e2.

2 Waters, H., et al. “The economic dimensions of interpersonal violence.” Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2004. <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2004/9241591609.pdf>.

*The California Research Bureau is a division within the California State Library, providing in-depth research and non-partisan public policy analysis to members of the State Legislature and the Governor. [www.library.ca.gov/crb](http://www.library.ca.gov/crb).*

*Jason Van Court, author of this Short Subject, is a Senior Researcher at CRB. He can be reached at [jvancourt@library.ca.gov](mailto:jvancourt@library.ca.gov).*