



## The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

The public health approach is a four-step process that can be applied to violence and other health problems that affect populations.

### STEP 1: Define the Problem

The first step in preventing violence is to understand it. Grasping the magnitude of the problem involves analyzing data such as the number of violence-related behaviors, injuries, and deaths. Data can demonstrate how frequently violence occurs, where it occurs, trends, and who the victims and perpetrators are. These data can be obtained from police reports, medical examiner files, vital records, hospital charts, registries, population-based surveys, and other sources.

*Case Study:* Information about violent deaths is often fragmented, therefore, state and community leaders do not always have the necessary data to make program decisions. With funding from CDC, states can collect timely, complete, and accurate data about violent deaths. This information is entered into the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). The data provide decision makers with a clear picture of violent activity in their states. [Learn more.](#)

### STEP 2: Identify Risk and Protective Factors

It is not enough to know the magnitude of a public health problem. It is important to understand what factors protect people or put them at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence. Why are risk and protective factors useful? They help identify where prevention efforts need to be focused.

Risk factors do not cause violence. The presence of a risk factor does not mean that a person will always experience violence. Victims are never responsible for the harm inflicted upon them.

*Case study:* CDC is funding a research project to examine the relationship between exposure to violent media, including videogames, and serious violent behavior such as assaults and injuries. Researchers are studying the specific aspects of media that increase the risk for violence. They are also identifying factors that protect youth from the effects of violent media and factors that make some youth more susceptible to media influences than others.

<p>▶ <b>Risk Factor</b> Characteristic that increases the likelihood of a person becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence</p> <p>▶ <b>Protective Factor</b> Characteristic that decreases the likelihood of a person becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence because it provides a buffer against risk</p>
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### STEP 3: Develop and Test Prevention Strategies

Research data and findings from needs assessments, community surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups are useful for designing prevention programs. Using these data and findings is known as an evidence-based approach to program planning. Once programs are implemented, they are evaluated rigorously to determine their effectiveness.

*Case study:* CDC has developed and is testing a communication initiative for 6th- to 8th-grade students. Choose Respect is an initiative to help adolescents form healthy relationships to prevent dating abuse before it starts. (<http://www.chooserespect.org>)

#### **STEP 4: Assure Widespread Adoption**

Once prevention programs have been proven effective, they must be disseminated. Communities are encouraged to adapt programs to meet their own needs and to evaluate the program's success. Dissemination techniques to promote widespread adoption include training, networking, technical assistance, and process evaluation.

*Case study:* In 2001, CDC launched the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center to prevent youth violence and suicide. The Resource Center includes a website, toll-free hotline, and fax-on-demand service. Users can request information about statistics, research, and prevention programs. (<http://www.safeyouth.org>)

