

The State of Michigan is committed to preventing violent deaths of its citizens. Currently available data, however, do not always provide the information needed to assess accurately all factors associated with such a death. For example, death certificates provide victim data, but do not provide perpetrator information; police reports focus more on the perpetrator and less on the victim.

In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) received funding to establish the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). The NVDRS is a state-based surveillance system linking data from law enforcement, medical examiners/coroners, vital statistics, and crime laboratories to help participating states design and implement tailored prevention and intervention efforts. These sources individually provide data that explain violence only in a fragmented, narrow context. When linked together, a more comprehensive picture of violent death is created. Moreover, unlike existing national data systems such as death certificates and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Reports, the NVDRS can be used to examine specific subtypes of violence such as combination murder-suicides and assault weapon shootings. It can also more precisely identify cases of intimate partner violence and child abuse-related death. Information from the system can describe trends for specific types of violence and provide insight into optimal points for intervention, thus improving prevention efforts.

MiVDRS Goals and Objectives

The Injury and Violence Prevention Section in the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is implementing the NVDRS in place in Michigan. As a public health surveillance system, laws that protect other types of health department records, such as communicable disease records, also apply to MiVDRS files. Names of victims and suspects are not released and MDCH will submit information to CDC only after it has been stripped of all potentially identifying details, including names, addresses, dates of birth, and agency identifiers.

The goal of the MiVDRS is to provide the state and its communities with a clearer understanding of violent deaths so they can be prevented. This will be accomplished in two ways—

- informing decision makers and program planners about the magnitude, trends, and characteristics of violent deaths so appropriate prevention strategies and policies can be put into place
- evaluating state-based prevention programs and strategies.

The MiVDRS has four main objectives that reflect the objectives for the national system:

- provide timely preliminary information on violent deaths (e.g., basic counts of murders and suicides) through faster data retrieval
- describe in detail the circumstances that may have contributed to similar violent deaths
- better characterize perpetrators, including their relationships to victim(s)
- link records on violent deaths that occurred in the same incident to help identify risk factors for multiple homicides or homicides-suicides.

Data Collection

The MiVDRS will collect detailed information on victims and offenders, including:

- demographics
- substance use
- relationship of victim to offender
- circumstances leading to the injury
- whether the event occurred at home or work
- date and location of the incident
- weapon type

Data sources used include death certificates, medical examiner records, law enforcement case files, crime laboratory records, and Child Death Review records. The data will be collected and stored in an incident-based, relational database. Information gained from analysis of the MiVDRS data will support state and local policy makers and advocates as they work to understand the context of violent death, develop or provide support for appropriate prevention strategies, and evaluate their efforts.