

PRIVATE GUNS
PUBLIC HEALTH

“In scholarly, sober analytic assessments, including rigorous critiques of NRA-popularized pseudoscience, David Hemenway constructs a convincing case that firearm availability is a critical and proximal cause of unparalleled carnage. By formulating such violence as a public health issue, he proposes workable policies analogous to ones that reduced injuries from tobacco, alcohol, and automobiles.”

—JEROME P. KASSIRER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF EMERITUS,
NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE,
AND DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR,
TUFTS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

“Much has been said in recent years about the ‘public health approach to violence,’ but it is unclear whether many well-intentioned people using that phrase understand what it means. Hemenway identifies problems in widely cited research and provides a clear and concise description of how public health approaches can be used to reduce firearm-related injuries and deaths. The book, which intersperses dispassionate critiques of population-based research with news bulletins about individuals, reads quickly and easily.”

—SUSAN B. SORENSON,
UCLA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

“David Hemenway marshals solid empirical evidence to weave a forceful and persuasive argument for reasonable policies to minimize the harm from guns. He carefully constructs the argument for a regulatory structure that borrows from successful efforts to reduce injuries in everyday life. Every legislator should read this book.”

—JEFFREY FAGAN,
PROFESSOR OF LAW AND PUBLIC HEALTH,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

“As a former District Attorney and Attorney General, I know the urgency of providing safe homes, schools and neighborhoods for all. This remarkable tour-de-force is a powerful study of one promising solution: a data-rich, eminently readable demonstration of why we should treat gun violence as an American epidemic.”

—SCOTT HARSHBARGER,
FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MASSACHUSETTS,
PRESIDENT AND CEO OF COMMON CAUSE

“Hemenway’s book provides a comprehensive look at the epidemic of firearm injury in the United States. He writes that the experience of high-income nations shows that when there are reasonable restrictions on guns, gun injuries need not be such a large public health problem. This book is an important resource for educating politicians and the public who are looking to build safer communities. It is also an important reference for members of the public health and medical communities who see the results of firearm injuries and are struggling to find solutions to the gun wars waged both in our homes and on our streets.”

—BARBARA BARLOW,
DIRECTOR OF SURGERY AT
HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER

PRIVATE GUNS PUBLIC HEALTH

David Hemenway



THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
Ann Arbor

Copyright © 2004 by David Hemenway
All rights reserved
Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America
© Printed on acid-free paper

2007 2006 2005 2004 4 3 2 1

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise,
without the written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hemenway, David, 1945–
Private guns, public health / David Hemenway.
p. ; cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-472-11405-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Gunshot wounds—United States—Prevention. 2. Firearms—Law and
legislation—United States. 3. Gun control—United States. 4. Public
policy—United States. 5. Medical policy—United States. 6. Firearms
ownership—United States.

[DNLM: 1. Firearm ownership—United States. 2. Wounds,
Gunshot—epidemiology—United States. 3. Public Health—United States.
4. Public Policy—United States. WO 807 H498p 2004] I. Title.

RD96.3.H45 2004
617.1'45'0973—dc22

2003024583

**FOR MY FRIENDS IN
INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL**

*Nothing is so powerful as an
idea whose time has come.*

—*Victor Hugo*