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## Teenager injured in accidental shooting

**Injury was second caused by kids playing with guns in a week**

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LAS VEGAS SUN

A 13-year-old Las Vegas boy was accidentally shot in the stomach by a neighborhood friend Sunday night during a family barbecue at a home in northeast Las Vegas.

Two teenage boys were at the home in the 2700 block of Wild Cactus Court when they came across a handgun in the garage around 8 p.m., Metro Police Sgt. Ron Fox said.

The boys apparently were playing with the gun in the garage when one of the boys accidentally shot the other boy, Fox said.

Several adults were inside the house during the shooting, but apparently did not know what the boys were up to in the garage, Fox said.

The victim from Sunday's incident was taken to University Medical Center and listed in good condition Sunday night. Police say he was not a resident of the house.

No arrests have been made and the shooting has been ruled accidental, police said. Police did not release the identities of the boys involved.

Police would not say who the gun belonged to or where the boys found the gun, pending further investigation.

It was the second accidental shooting of a Las Vegas teenager in one week. On March 29, 14-year-old Erica Mendoza was killed when she was accidentally shot in the head by her 15-year-old brother, Rocky Mendoza.

National experts say that while such shootings are common, they have been on the decline in recent years. However, experts say the issue

comes down to accessibility and responsibility, which falls on the shoulders of adults.

"We find that so many parents are not properly storing guns or keeping them away from kids," said Paul Marchione, executive director of Common Sense About Kids and Guns in Washington, D.C. "It's up to parents to unload and lock the guns to prevent these accidents."

The nonprofit organization, which says it is not anti-guns but rather pro-education, notes that 40 percent of American households have guns. The group says that 30 percent of homes with guns have them stored unlocked and loaded.

Marchione said that scenario is typical because "parents have a false sense of security. They think that simply telling their children not to play with guns is enough. While it is important to tell them that, it is not enough.

"Children see guns used in a variety of situations from movies to video games. Many studies have shown that the child's first inclination when he picks up a gun is to pull the trigger just to see what it does. You have to take steps to take away the accessibility to the weapon."

In 2002, the latest year for which statistics are available, 13,053 children from infants to 19-year-olds were wounded by handguns in the United States, Common Sense About Kids and Guns said.

Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta show that accidental gun deaths for that age group between 1996 and 2001, the latest year for which that agency has released data, have declined from 376 to 182. Each year during that period, the number of deaths has declined, the CDC said.

In last week's incident, a teenager had been playing with a handgun in front of several other teens and apparently did not realize the weapon was loaded, police said.

The gun belonged to Erica Mendoza's brother-in-law, who legally purchased the 9mm handgun earlier that day.

Services for Erica Mendoza were held at 10 a.m. today in Bunkers Chapel, while burial followed in Eden Vale Memorial Park.

Although gun safety locks are not required by law in Nevada, local police and Project ChildSafe, a nationwide program promoting the safe handling and storage of firearms, are encouraging parents throughout Las Vegas to use them to decrease the risk of an accidental shooting.

Local police and Project ChildSafe gave away 20,000 gun locks in Clark County in December. The state of Nevada is scheduled to receive about 109,000 more gun locks through Project ChildSafe by this summer.

Free gun locks are available at:

- Metro Police Evidence Vault, 3201 Technology Court near Stewart Avenue and Mohave Road.
  - Metro Police Plaza Desk, 400 E. Stewart Ave. (Ask for program through the Firearms Detail.)
  - North Las Vegas Police Crime Prevention Office, Ferrell Street and Craig Road.
  - North Las Vegas Police Main Station, 1301 E. Lake Mead Blvd.
  - Henderson Police Station, 223 Lead St.
  - Henderson Police Station 300 S. Green Valley Pkwy.
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