

# Active Shooter Drills

## **Background:**

Seventeen school shootings have occurred in Iowa since 1970. This figure includes the March 7, 2022, shooting outside East High School in Des Moines that left Jose Lopez-Perez, 15, dead and two teen girls injured. It also includes the 2018 shots fired near a Des Moines North and Hoover football game.

Following the Parkland, Florida, high school shooting in 2018 where 17 people were killed, Iowa passed a law requiring school districts to regularly review emergency plans and regularly train staff and students with fire, tornado, natural disaster, and intruder drills.

## **Department of Homeland Security:**

In the booklet provided to schools by the Department of Homeland Security, the third part of a three-part response process involves fighting back against an active shooter. It states:

### **Take action against the active shooter**

As a last resort, and only when your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter by:

- Acting as aggressively as possible against him/her
- Throwing items and improvising weapons
- Yelling
- Committing to your actions

## **Review of Research:**

Active shooter drills in schools are associated with increases in depression (39%), stress and anxiety (42%), and physiological health problems (23%) overall, including children from as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers.

Concerns over death increased by 22 percent, with words like blood, pain, clinics, and pills becoming a consistent feature of social media posts in school communities in the 90 days after a school drill.

*See the article on the next page.*

## **Options and/or Alternatives:**

The Belmont-Klemme Community School District performs classroom lockdown drills twice each year. These drills are designed to protect classroom students from a variety of threats including an active shooter.

## **Recommended Action:**

I recommend the district continue with lock-down drills, train teachers separately on how to respond to an active shooter, and refrain from implementing any response by students to an active shooter.

# The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools

## *Time to Rethink Reactive School Safety Strategies*

By Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund  
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### **Executive Summary**

Active shooter drills are implemented in over 95 percent of American K–12 schools today. While school shootings are relatively rare—accounting for less than 1 percent of the more than 40,000 annual US gun deaths—they instill a deep sense of fear in communities, propelling school systems to “do something” fast. In a series of recent reports, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund (Everytown), in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), highlighted the importance of proactive school safety planning to intervene before school violence occurs, and outlined a set of concrete recommendations to respond to active shooter incidents. This research concluded that there is almost no research affirming the value of active shooter drills for preventing school shootings or protecting the school community when shootings do occur.

While there is limited proof of the effectiveness of these drills, anecdotal evidence, including many online conversations, increasingly suggests that active shooter drills may be harmful to mental health. In order to examine these concerns using scientific methods, Everytown partnered with Georgia Institute of Technology’s Social Dynamics and Wellbeing Lab (Georgia Tech) to study the immediate and long-term impacts of active

shooter drills on the health and wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents.

A large and growing body of research demonstrates that advanced analysis of social media data can unobtrusively inform causal conclusions about the impacts of crises and traumatic events (e.g., wars, community violence, terrorism, and mass shootings) on mental health. In this study, researchers applied these same rigorous big data and psycholinguistic analytic approaches to millions of community conversations occurring over Twitter and Reddit to assess the impacts of active shooter drills in schools. Social media conversations were analyzed for a total of 114 K–12 schools with a focus on activity in the 90 days before and 90 days after school drills occurred.

The results were sobering: Active shooter drills in schools are associated with increases in depression (39%), stress and anxiety (42%), and physiological health problems (23%) overall, including children from as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers. Concerns over death increased by 22 percent, with words like blood, pain, clinics, and pills becoming a consistent feature of social media posts in school communities in the 90 days after a school drill. These findings unveil even more reason to pause before rushing toward active shooter drills as a potential solution to school violence, as evidence suggests that they are causing lasting emotional and physical harm to students, teachers, and the larger community.

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>