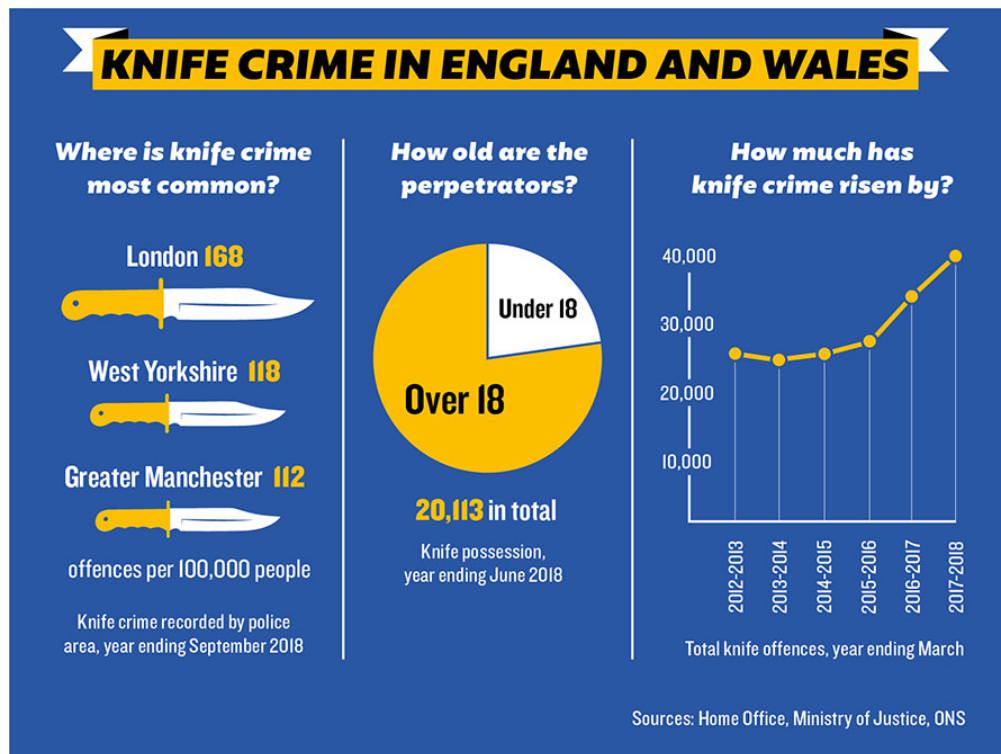


Knife crime

Knife crime in the UK has been steadily rising since 2014. The Home Secretary Sajid Javid says it must be treated like “the outbreak of some virulent disease”. But why is it happening?



Epidemic: More than 1,000 under-19s were treated for stabbings by the NHS in England last year.

Q: Is knife crime rising in the UK?

A: Yes. Every week, more and more stories about knives appear in the news. Young lives are lost. Families are torn apart. Politicians promise action. But what is going on behind the headlines?

Government statistics show that knife crime has risen by 22% in England and Wales since 2014. In London, it has risen by 36.7%.

Q: So, is it mostly a London problem?

A: The statistics are highest in the capital city, but knife crime happens across the country.

Since 2010, the knife crime rates in the North East have risen by 33%; in Yorkshire and the Humber, by 77%; and in Wales, by 50%.

Q: What counts as knife crime?

A: Any crime involving a knife — including murders, robberies and assaults. It is a crime to threaten to kill somebody with a knife, even if you don't actually hurt them. It is illegal to carry a knife without a **good reason**, or to sell one to someone under 18.

Certain kinds of knives are banned from being bought or sold in the UK — including butterfly knives, switchblades and knives which are disguised as ordinary objects.

Q: What is causing the surge?

A: This is a difficult question to answer, as there is not one single reason that everyone can agree on. The reality is that lots of different factors are probably behind it.

Many have blamed **austerity**. Police budgets have been cut by around 20% since 2010, and the number of police officers in England and Wales has fallen by about 20,000. In November, Home Secretary Sajid Javid admitted that boosting these numbers would be “an important part” of tackling violent crime. But it is not just about the police — cuts to youth services may have contributed to young people to fall into crime.

Some blame the “**county lines**” drug networks, in which city gangs trick or force vulnerable children into supplying drugs to rural areas. These networks have been linked to rising violence, especially outside cities.

Others have blamed social media, drill music and school exclusions.

Q: What is being done about it?

A: In February 2019, the Government announced that it would spend £9.5 million on community projects designed to tackle knife crime in vulnerable areas.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has invested more money in the Metropolitan Police, including setting up a new Violent Crime Task Force. However, in 2018, he admitted that it could take “a generation” to solve the problem. He gave the example of **Glasgow**, where violent crime was reduced by treating it as a public health issue.

In March, Home Secretary Sajid Javid added that knife crime needs to be treated like a “virulent disease”. In other words, it is a health issue as well as a criminal one.

Q: What happens if you get caught with a knife?

A: Being caught with a knife can lead to four years in prison, even if you don't use it. It could also mean a criminal record, which would make your life difficult in the future when seeking employment, for example.

Killing someone with a knife means a minimum of 25 years in prison.

Q: What if you need it for protection?

A: You don't. In fact, carrying a knife makes you more — not less — likely to be stabbed. It means that fights can quickly escalate, or your own weapon could be used against you. Remember, 99% of young people do not carry knives.

Q: What should I do if I'm worried about knives?

A: If you are involved in knife crime and want to get out, you can ask a trusted adult for help. If you want to get rid of a knife anonymously, there are designated weapons bins in cities around the UK.

You can anonymously report information about knife crimes at [Fearless.org.uk](https://fearless.org.uk), or find more support using the resources under Become An Expert.

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 999.

**YOU DECIDE**

1. Why do some young people feel the need to carry knives?

**ACTIVITIES**

1. You have been put in charge of reducing knife crime in the UK. List the first three things you would do. Take it in turns to explain your ideas to the rest of the class. Do others agree with your solutions?

**BECOME AN EXPERT**

Read this article on theday.co.uk for links to recommended videos and further reading.

**WORD WATCH**

Since 2010 – According to a House of Commons report on knife crime in England and Wales, published last November.

Good reason – This might include transporting knives that will be used for work, film productions or in an exhibition. It also includes knives carried for religious reasons, such as the Sikh kirpan. It does NOT include self-defence.

Austerity – Reducing government spending in order to “balance the budget”. The UK Government began a period of austerity in 2010, when a coalition government between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats was elected. The Conservatives now say that austerity is over.

County lines – Gangs have been known to recruit children as young as 12 to transport and sell drugs in rural neighbourhoods. Sometimes, this is done through violence and intimidation; at other times by exploiting a vulnerable child. Last year, a county lines drug dealer was convicted of trafficking children under the Modern Slavery Act.

Glasgow – In 2005, Glasgow was named the “murder capital” of Europe. A Violence Reduction Unit was set up that year. Since then, murders have fallen by 60%.