

Requirements for Hunters Under 18 Years of Age (Updated)

In June 2022, The Delaware General Assembly passed legislation, House Bill 451, which was subsequently signed by the Governor into law. This legislation amended the age in which a person can possess, purchase, and sell a firearm and other deadly weapons, including archery equipment. While this legislation did not specifically focus on hunting, the changes affect the activity. When passed, the legislation provided a 3-year grace period for which some aspects of the changes did not go into effect immediately. The grace period ended in June 2025. Please refer to the table below for information involving the changes and how the hunters of various ages are impacted regarding which firearms and archery equipment they may use.

UPDATE: On August 29, 2025, the Superior Court for the State of Delaware determined that Delaware's constitutional right to keep and bear arms extends to all Delawareans aged 18 or older. *Birney et al. v. Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security et al.*, Del. Superior Court C.A. No. K23C-07-019 RLG (Opinion dated August 29, 2025). This court decision affects Delaware's hunting supervision rules for the 2025-26 hunting seasons that begin Monday, September 1.

In light of the Birney ruling, DNREC has adjusted the Delaware Hunting and Trapping Guide to clarify that individuals between the age of 18 to 21 can hunt without being under the direct supervision of a person over 21. The Birney decision did not impact any rules applicable to persons under the age of 18. The hunting supervision requirements that are now in effect are contained in this revised chart.

Requirements for Hunters Under 18 Years of Age

Age	Archery and Crossbows	Muzzleloaders	Shotguns	Centerfire Rifles: Including Straight-Walled Pistol- Calibers	Rimfire Firearms	Handguns	Pellet/Air Guns ¹
Under 16	Must be under Direct Supervision of someone 21 years of age or older						
16 to Under 18	May hunt without Direct Supervision	Must be under Direct Supervision of someone 21 years of age or older					May hunt without Direct Supervision
18 and over	May hunt without Direct Supervision						

¹ Only gray squirrels may be harvested with a pellet/air gun, and the caliber must not exceed .177. No other game species may be hunted with a pellet/air gun.

Definition:

"Direct Supervision"- a person will be considered directly supervised while hunting if a person 21 years of age or older, who is the lawful holder of a hunting license or has a lawful right to hunt and has a License Exempt Number (LEN), is always within 30 yards and in direct line of sight of the supervised person. The supervising person must be lawfully allowed to hunt in Delaware.