

Examples of Different Rounds and the Armor That Can Protect You Against Them

To most people, a bullet proof vest is a simple product that can stop a bullet. It is true that a bullet proof vest is designed to stop a bullet, but as any in Law Enforcement will be more than aware, there are a great many [different types of bullets](#). In response, body armor manufacturers offer different levels of protection depending on the ammunition it can protect against. A bullet proof vest cannot guarantee your protection against ammunition of any kind, but certainly can't protect against ammunition above its prescribed level. Understanding exactly what a vest can protect against will help ensure you are protected properly. The following list compiles some of the most popular and available rounds, the firearms they can be used in, and what level of body armor you will need to protect against each.

9mm Parabellum

The 9mm Parabellum is commonly known as the most widely used handgun ammunition, thanks in part to its adoption by Law Enforcement. Made in Germany, the 9mm can be used in semi-automatic pistols as well, increasing its popularity. A Level IIa vest will stop this round at lower velocities, but at higher velocities a Level II vest is needed.

10mm Auto

The 10mm Auto suffers from high recoil, though is known for its stopping power. However, despite its use in certain branches of law enforcement it never gained the popularity of its shorter counterpart (the .40 S&W). The 10mm requires a Level IIa vest for protection.

.40 S&W

The .40 S&W was named for its creator, Smith & Wesson, and was designed as a shorter version of the 10mm Auto to be used by Law Enforcement. The .40 S&W has gained popularity among Officers since its introduction in 1990 thanks to its increased power and decreased recoil compared to similar rounds. Stopping the .40 S&W requires a Level IIa bullet resistant vest.

.357 SIG

The .357 SIG was named for its manufacturer Sig Sauer, and is almost identical to the .357 Magnum. It does however boast decreased recoil and increased reliability, while also being compatible with autoloader platforms. Protection against the .357 SIG requires Level IIa body armor.

.45 ACP

The .45 ACP was designed to be used in John Browning's prototype Colt Semi-automatic pistol, and gained popularity from 1911 thanks to its adoption by the US Army. The .45 ACP, also known as the .45 Auto, is famous for its use in the M1911 pistol, and is prized for its high velocity and moderate recoil. The .45 ACP is nevertheless heavy and costly to produce, and requires a bullet resistant vest at Level IIa.

.357 Magnum

The .357 Magnum is credited with beginning the 'Magnum era' of handguns. This round was introduced in 1934 and can be fired from revolvers and certain semi-automatics like the Desert Eagle. It is renowned for its stopping power, and will need a Level II vest to protect against it.

.44 Magnum

The .44 Magnum is possibly the most famous ammunition in the world, thanks in no small part to Dirty Harry. However, until it was featured in the film it had been largely ignored and remained unknown from its introduction in 1955. This round has excellent stopping power, though this naturally causes high recoil and muzzle flash. For this ammo, a Level IIIa vest is needed.

The armor required to protect against the rounds mentioned above is commonly known as 'soft armor'. This is because protection against these bullets can be achieved using layers of soft fabric like [Kevlar](#). This means that protection against the vast majority of handgun ammunition only requires soft armor, albeit at Level IIIa. However, for rounds used in higher powered weaponry like rifles and automatics, or for some bullets used in handguns, additional protection will be required. These higher levels of protection use additional rigid panels usually made of ceramics or polyethylene. These plates are still lightweight, but should only be reserved for specific threats. Below are just some of the rounds that require rigid protection at Level III or IV.

5.56x45mm NATO

The 5.56x45mm NATO is another commonly used rifle round, the most famous weapon being the M16 rifle. However, it is often criticized for being unreliable, and is affected by the weapon it is used in to a great extent. Despite this, it remains popular, and will require a Level III vest.

.308 Winchester

The .308 Winchester is most commonly used by big game hunters and military organizations, making it one of the most successful rounds available. The .308 Winchester duplicates the ballistic specifications of the .30-06, and will require a Level III bullet proof vest.

.30-06

The .30-06 gained fame with its use by the US Armed Forces from 1906 to 1956. Its low recoil made it a very popular cartridge to use because of its simplicity. For this round, a Level III bullet resistant vest is needed.

7.62mmx51mm NATO

The 7.62mmx51mm NATO is a popular and versatile round that shares similarities with other types of rifle ammunition. Released in 1954, the 7.62mmx51mm NATO is used in a variety of rifles and automatics, and is available in an armor-piercing variant. This will require a Level IV vest, though a regular 7.62mmx51mm NATO will be stopped by a Level III vest.

The ammunition listed here is just a small sample of some of the most common or well-known bullets available. It is important that Officers are aware of exactly what their vest can protect them against, and whether or not this corresponds with the threats they are likely to face. For example, it may seem like good practice to wear Level IV armor to ensure that all threats are protected against. However, the additional weight and bulk means that unless rifle or automatics are likely to be used against you, you will only be at a disadvantage.

Every level of body armor is decided upon by the National Institute of Justice and their rigorous testing methods. For more information on the ballistic protection of bullet proof vests, see [the NIJ's Official Documentation](#) regarding testing and grading.