

Study: 39% of parents wrongly believe children don't know where gun is stored

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Gunfire killed about 4,500 U.S. children and adolescents in 2015 and sends about 20,000 to emergency departments (EDs) annually, according to a new study.

The review also looks at children's access to guns and the role of pediatricians in preventing injuries.

"As a pediatrician and a parent, I am acutely aware of the number of children who suffer injuries or who die from firearms, and I find the rate of firearm injury and death among children and adolescents in this country alarming," said lead author Kavita Parikh, M.D., M.S.H.S., associate professor of pediatrics at Children's National Health System.

Dr. Parikh is part of a firearm injury prevention research work group that led the review published in the article "Pediatric Firearm-Related Injuries in the United States" (Parikh K, et al. *Hosp Pediatr*. May 23, 2017, <http://hosppeds.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/05/19/hped.2016-0146>). The authors called firearm injuries "a pediatric public health crisis." Their findings are presented below.

Injuries and death

- 4,500 children under 21 died from firearm violence in 2015.
- 20,000 children present to EDs for firearm-related injuries annually.
- 90% of those ED visits are by children ages 12-19.
- Firearm injuries are more likely to be accidental for younger children and intentional among older children.
- Among adolescents ages 15-19, homicide by firearms is the second leading cause of death and suicide by firearms is the third leading cause.

Access

- Roughly 18% to 64% of homes have firearms, varying by location.
- 39% of parents erroneously believe their children do not know where their gun is stored, and 22% wrongly believe their child never handled their gun.
- In 2011, about 5% of high school students recently carried a gun.
- 65% of high school seniors had a gun in their household.

"Unfortunately, we found also that parents may have a false sense of security as to whether their children access their firearms," Dr. Parikh said.

Interventions

Providing free gun safety devices seems to be the most effective intervention, and some studies found benefits to educating parents about gun safety, according to the research.

The study cites AAP [recommendations](#) calling for pediatricians to counsel families on gun safety during well-child visits and encourage parents to ask about guns in other homes where their children spend time. Pediatricians also should screen children with mental health or substance use issues for access to guns and educate trainees about preventing firearm injuries.

Pediatricians can be advocates for federal funding of firearm research and for laws that aim to prevent firearm-related injuries and deaths. The review found evidence supporting universal background checks and firearm identification requirements. Child safety laws also may reduce some firearm deaths.

“Fundamentally, we want to empower pediatricians and hospitalists to get involved with reducing firearm-related injuries to children in this country,” Dr. Parikh said.

Authors of a [related commentary](#) said the study “serves as a timely reminder for all health care providers that we cannot afford to be silent about gun violence.”

“In order to uphold our duty as pediatricians to protect and improve the health of children, we must educate ourselves about gun violence and become vocal advocates for sensible, effective solutions,” they wrote.

Resources

- [AAP resource page: "How Pediatricians Can Advocate for Children's Safety in Their Communities"](#)
- [AAP video, "We Can Prevent Gun Violence"](#)
- [AAP News article "Health groups call for gun control measures"](#)
- [HealthyChildren.org recommendations on gun safety](#)
- [June 2 is National Gun Violence Awareness Day and June 21 is Asking Saves Kids Day.](#)

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