

## Study: State and federal background checks reduce teen gun carrying

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Teens are less likely to carry a gun if they live in a state requiring universal background checks in addition to federal requirements, according to a new study.

Federal law requires licensed gun dealers but not private sellers to perform background checks, so researchers from Indiana University set out to look at whether this requirement was enough to keep guns out of teens' hands.

They used data on high school students across the country from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 1993-2017, which includes several years before the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) launched in 1998. The study also looks at whether teens lived in a state requiring background checks on all gun purchases.

The study showed just under 6% of teens carried a gun, and 83% of those were from states without a universal background check law, according to "National Instant Criminal Background Check and Youth Gun Carrying," (Timsina LR, et al. *Pediatrics*. Dec. 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1071>).

Neither the NICS nor a state universal background check law alone was enough to significantly impact gun carrying rates, but together they reduced the risk by 25%.

"Our study results suggest the NICS is only effective in reducing adolescent gun carrying when in the presence of state laws requiring universal background checks on all prospective gun buyers," co-author Teresa M. Bell, Ph.D., said in a video abstract.

"Further, states with universal background check laws need access to a national system such as the NICS in order to reduce teen gun carrying."

Authors noted universal background checks might deter teens who otherwise may have tried to purchase a gun from a private seller. They also could stop some adults from buying guns they planned to sell to teens.

“Implementing (universal background checks) nationally may decrease the number of guns accessible to adolescents and, in turn, reduce their gun carrying,” according to the study.

Authors also stressed the need for adults to store their firearms properly so teens can’t access them.

The best way to protect kids from guns is to keep them out of the home, according to the AAP. In homes with guns, the AAP recommends keeping them locked and unloaded with ammunition locked separately.

Authors of a [related commentary](#) said the study adds to the knowledge about gun policies, but more research is needed and can be done with federal funding.

“The sound application of rigorous scientific and public health methods has achieved marked success in other disciplines of injury prevention (eg, motor vehicle crash deaths, drowning), and parallel investments to advance the science of firearm injury prevention have the potential to reverse current trends in child and adolescent firearm deaths,” authors wrote.

## Resources

- [AAP policy statement "Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population"](#)
- [AAP resource page How Pediatricians Can Advocate for Children's Safety in Their Communities](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on reducing gun injuries](#)
- [AAP News stories about firearms](#)
- [Pediatrics collection on firearms](#)

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