



Study finds increase in gun-related deaths among children, adolescents during pandemic

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Editor's note: For the latest news on COVID-19, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNewsCOVID19>.

Gun-related deaths among children increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the number of deaths above the average roughly equaled the number of children who died from the virus, according to a new analysis.

“Factors that may have caused the observed increase in gun-related deaths among children are unknown and include psychological and economic strain due to the pandemic as well as greater time spent at home due to school closures,” authors wrote in “Child Deaths by Gun Violence in the US During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” ([Pena PA, Jena A. JAMA Netw Open. Aug. 4, 2022](#)).

Researchers analyzed gun-related deaths in children under 18 years from 2014-'21 using data from the [Gun Violence Archive](#). During that time 8,477 children and adolescents were killed, 78% of whom were ages 12-17 and 79% of whom were boys, according to the study.

About 58% of those who died were from an area where at least half the population was Black or Hispanic, “suggesting family and neighborhood socioeconomic conditions may be important mediators,” authors wrote.

Deaths from guns increased after the COVID-19 pandemic began in mid-March 2020, resulting in about one additional death among children and adolescents per day compared to the pre-pandemic period.

In total, there were about 733 more deaths from March 2020-December 2021 than would have been expected based on pre-pandemic trends. Those additional deaths, which likely are an underestimate, are nearly equivalent to the number of children who died from COVID-19 during that time.

“These findings highlight the potential importance of indirect health outcomes in children during the COVID-19 pandemic,” authors wrote.

The findings support a [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) study](#) earlier this year that found a spike in youth firearm-related homicides and suicides in 2020 that contributed to the highest firearm homicide rate the overall U.S. population has seen since 1994.

The AAP recommends families with children do not keep guns in the home. Those who do should keep them locked and unloaded. Ammunition should be locked separately. For years, the AAP has been advocating for legislation to help reduce firearm injuries and deaths and providing pediatricians with guidance on protecting children (see resources).

Earlier this year, AAP President Moira A. Szilagyi, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, [testified before a congressional committee](#) on the need for gun violence prevention and shared more than 300 pediatricians’ stories. She [returned to Washington, D.C.](#), this summer to recognize the passage of significant anti-gun violence legislation.

“Congress passed a law that not only aims to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals, it also will increase access to trauma-informed care across all of our systems and make schools emotionally and physically safe,” Dr. Szilagyi wrote in her [latest letter to AAP members](#). “... We know more needs to be done. And the AAP will continue to advocate until every child is safe.

Resources

- [AAP policy *Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population*](#)
- [AAP policy *Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention*](#)
- [AAP clinical report *Suicide and Suicide Attempts in Adolescents*](#)
- [AAP information on gun safety and injury prevention](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on reducing gun injuries](#)
- [AAP gun safety campaign toolkit](#)
- [AAP News stories about firearms](#)
- [Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 988](#)