



Surgeon general declares firearm violence a public health crisis

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Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

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The U.S. surgeon general is declaring firearm violence a public health crisis.

In a [new advisory](#), U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., called for tougher laws, more research and increased access to mental health support.

“Firearm violence is an urgent public health crisis that has led to loss of life, unimaginable pain and profound grief for far too many Americans,” Dr. Murthy said in a statement Tuesday. “We don’t have to continue down this path, and we don’t have to subject our children to the ongoing horror of firearm violence in America. All Americans deserve to live their lives free from firearm violence, as well as from the fear and devastation that it brings. It will take the collective commitment of our nation to turn the tide on firearm violence.”

Firearm-related injuries have surpassed motor vehicle crashes as the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the U.S. There were 4,603 children and teens killed by firearms in 2022. From 2012 to 2022, firearm suicide rates jumped 68% among children ages 10-14 years and 45% for adolescents and young adults ages 15-24 years. In addition, half of teens say they are worried about a school shooting.

As a whole, the U.S. population also has seen an increase in firearm-related deaths. There were 48,204 firearm deaths in 2022, which was more than 8,000 above the total in 2019 and more than 16,000 above the total in 2010. In 2022, about 56% of these deaths were homicides and 41% were suicides. About 79% of adults report experiencing stress from the possibility of a mass shooting.

Firearm violence has disproportionate impacts, according to the advisory. In 2022, about half of the youths who died from firearms were Black despite making up just 14% of the population. In every age group, people who are Black experienced higher firearm homicide rates than any other race. Among people 45 and older, those who are white had the highest rates of firearm suicide, while rates for people under 45 are highest among those who are American Indian or Alaska Native.

AAP President Benjamin D. Hoffman, M.D., FAAP, applauded the surgeon general's advisory.

"Pediatricians have long understood that gun violence is a public health threat to children and that its impact on families and communities can be devastating and long-lasting," Dr. Hoffman said. "The American Academy of Pediatrics welcomes the Surgeon General's Advisory on Firearm Violence, which shines a light on why we must all come together to address this public health crisis."

Dr. Murthy outlined an approach that includes

- increasing research on outcomes of firearm violence and the effectiveness of prevention strategies;
- implementing community violence interventions;
- requiring safe and secure firearm storage, including child access prevention laws and increasing education on these safety measures;
- implementing universal background checks and expanding purchaser licensing laws;
- banning assault weapons and large capacity magazines for civilians;
- requiring safety testing or safety features on firearms;
- implementing effective policies to remove firearms from people who are dangerous to themselves or others;
- creating safer conditions in public places related to firearm use and carry; and
- increasing access to affordable, high-quality mental health care and substance use treatment.

Earlier this year, the White House announced [new executive actions](#) to promote safe firearm storage, citing data showing about 4.6 million children live in homes with unsecured firearms. About 76% of school shootings are committed with guns from the home, and 80% of firearm suicides by youths involved a gun belonging to a family member.

The [AAP advises families](#) who own guns to keep them locked and unloaded with ammunition locked separately.

Gun owners who have safes with a fingerprint locking feature should make sure their safe is not among those that have been recalled. More than [130,000 were recalled](#) this month amid reports that they have been opened by unauthorized users, including children. In recent months, [120,000 others were recalled](#) after a 6-year-old gained access, and [61,000 were recalled](#) after a 12-year-old died.

Keeping children safe from firearms has been a priority for the AAP. Recent efforts have included calling for more [federal funding of research](#), [holding a town hall](#) with nearly 200 pediatricians and forming a new [Firearm Injury Prevention Special Interest Group](#). In August 2023, leaders from around the country chose [two firearm-related resolutions](#) to be among their top 10 priorities for the Academy.

The AAP's Gun Safety, Injury, and Violence Prevention Community Grant Program has [kick-started gun violence prevention programs](#) in 10 communities. The efforts include distribution of gun locks, firearm safety training, community events, webinars, social media campaigns, public service announcements and educational materials.

In his latest [letter to members](#), Dr. Hoffman encouraged pediatricians to change one thing in their practice to help protect children from gun violence.

“We are pediatricians, and we do not shrink from the fight to protect those for whom we care, rising to meet the challenges with grit and determination,” he wrote. “We all agree that no child should ever be hurt by a gun. Let’s get to work.”

Resources

- [AAP policy statement *Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth: Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction*](#)
- [AAP gun safety and injury prevention resources](#)
- [Register for the AAP Firearm Injury Prevention Special Interest Group](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on firearm safety](#)
- [AAP gun safety toolkit](#)
- [Pediatrics journal collection on firearms](#)

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