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Pediatric Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths



Introduction: Gun violence due to homicide, suicide, or unintentional injuries is the leading cause of death for children in Tennessee. In the United States, millions of children live in a home with an unlocked and loaded firearm, with many knowing where it is located or even having touched it. The Tennessee American Academy of Pediatrics aims to produce education and guidance on reducing firearm-related injuries in children.

Methods: The present study examines current literature regarding firearm-related injuries, deaths, and safety nationally and in Tennessee, and the current and possible solutions to protect children from gun violence. Additionally, this review assesses the role of pediatricians in ensuring firearms are responsibly stored. This study aims to evaluate the importance of education on firearm safety, the success of current interventions and legislation, barriers to further intervention, and the best practices for reducing preventable injuries involving firearms in children.

Results: Firearm mortality disproportionately affects older children ages 15-17, with males and Black children experiencing higher rates. Tennessee currently has few laws regarding permits, child access prevention (CAP), or extreme risk protection orders (ERPO). It is possible the number of gun violence-related injuries in children could be reduced through provider counseling and inquiry on firearm safety, proper storage, and encouragement of parents to have more open conversations about firearms in the home. This paper details Tennessee's lack of policies and legislation, the impact on firearm ownership and storage, and the demographics of firearm mortality in children.

Conclusions: Stricter legislation, including CAP and ERPO laws, in Tennessee is paramount to reducing the number of firearm-related injuries and deaths in children. Firearm mortality is a public health crisis. Further research and policy is pivotal to protecting children's health. Constructing solutions and passing legislation continues to be challenging as political advocates and adversaries fail to reach common ground.