

Firearms are leading cause of death among U.S. youth

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Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and adolescents 0-19 years of age, with a staggering 83 percent increase in youth firearm fatalities over the past decade, according to a commentary published in

Lancet Child and Adolescent Health. Nearly two-thirds of youth firearm deaths were from homicides. Strikingly, Black youth had an unprecedented 40 percent increase in firearm fatalities between 2019 to 2020.

These tragic statistics come in the wake of the elementary school shooting in Texas earlier this week, pointing to the urgent need to take action to prevent more youth from dying by firearms.

"We must reverse this deeply troubling and unacceptable trend in youth [firearm](#) fatalities, especially among youth of color," said co-author Karen Sheehan, MD, MPH, Pediatric Emergency Medicine physician and Medical Director of Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, and Professor of Pediatrics, Medical Education and Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "We need more funding allocated to research-based prevention efforts so that we can save young lives before it's too late."

The authors also note that although firearm fatality rates started to rise in 2014, the dramatic societal upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic likely accelerated this increase with the escalation of mental health stressors and existential despair experienced by [youth](#). The seismic shift in youths' lives during the pandemic occurred in the context of a decades' long void of prevention efforts to decrease [firearm injuries](#) and deaths.

After Congress passed the Dickey Amendment in 1996, federal funding of firearm research was effectively halted, until 2019 when \$25 million in research funding was appropriated. This pales in comparison to research funding for other pediatric diseases and does not meet the current needs to advance the field. Congress has continued to fund firearm research at this same level for the last three years, while studies estimate that \$600 million should be appropriated in fiscal years

2022-2026 for data infrastructure and research funding for firearm injury prevention research.

"In addition to better understanding the risk and protective factors for firearm injuries and deaths, more funding is essential to develop, implement, and evaluate firearm injury prevention interventions at the individual, hospital, community, and policy levels," said co-author Samaa Kemal, MD, MPH, Pediatric Emergency Medicine Fellow at Lurie Children's.

More information: Lois K Lee et al, Addressing the void: firearm injury prevention in the USA, *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/S2352-4642\(22\)00158-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(22)00158-4)

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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