

Firearm-related injuries may have increased during COVID-19 pandemic

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Firearm injuries are a leading cause of death in children, and at the beginning of the pandemic, March 2020, there were record-breaking firearm sales. According to research presented during the 2022

American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition, firearm injuries to children increased during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Authors of the abstract, "Firearm Injury Epidemiology at a Pediatric Level 1 Trauma Center Before and During The COVID-19 Pandemic," found pediatric [firearm](#)-related injuries increased for the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the prior year. There was also an initial increase in injuries occurring at home where the shooter was a known family member or friend, and the firearm was not properly stored.

"We experienced an increase in pediatric firearm related injuries in spite of a decrease in total pediatric emergency department visits during the COVID-19 pandemic," said senior author Irma T. Ugalde, MD, associate professor and Director of Pediatric Emergency Medicine Research at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston. "These findings parallel the increase in background checks and firearm sales across the nation following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant increase in [firearm injuries](#) occurred in African American children."

Researchers performed a retrospective review of patient records in a Houston-area hospital from 2019 to 2021, including patient demographics and risk factors of pediatric firearm injuries presenting to the pediatric emergency department. The analysis showed the total number of pediatric firearm-related [injury](#) cases increased from 2019 to 2020 and remained elevated in 2021—88 in 2019 compared to 118 in 2020 and 115 in 2021. Firearm related injuries in Black children rose from 30.7% in 2019, 39.8% in 2020, and 47.8%, 2021, and there were increases in patients with mental health illness as well as injuries where the shooter was a known friend.

"Healthcare workers and all who work with children should remain

vigilant about screening for potential risk factors for violence and safe storage of firearms," Dr. Ugalde said.

More information: Firearm Injury Epidemiology at a Pediatric Level 1 Trauma Center Before and During The COVID-19 Pandemic, 2022 American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition

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