

# Not getting enough sleep linked to handgun carrying among teens

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Getting less than five hours of sleep a night leads to an increased likelihood of teens carrying a handgun—and even taking a gun to school, according to a new study published in [Sleep Health](#) by researchers from

FIU and the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Adolescents need eight to 10 [hours of sleep](#). Not getting enough sleep reduces cognitive functioning, the ability to regulate one's emotions and behaviors and the ability to engage in impulse control. This can lead teens to engage in risky behaviors, including carrying guns and taking them to school.

Teens who reported sleeping four or fewer hours a night had a 40 percent greater chance of carrying a handgun compared to teens who reported sleeping the recommended eight or more hours per night. Further, teens who slept four or fewer hours a night had an 85 percent greater chance of taking a handgun to school compared to teens who reported sleeping the recommended amount.

The study was based on a survey of more than 42,000 [middle school](#) and [high school students](#) in Florida.

"While research on the topic of sleep and its connection to delinquency has grown in recent years, fewer studies examine the specific connection between sleep and youth handgun carrying," said Ryan Meldrum, lead researcher and associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at the Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs.

"Investigating the linkages between sleep behaviors and handgun carrying is of value, in light of the potential for youths carrying firearms to hurt themselves, their peers, or [school staff](#), as well as the need for policy initiatives that could potentially help to address this serious public health concern," Meldrum added.

The study found that teens who reported sleeping five, six or seven hours a night were no more likely to report carrying a handgun or taking a handgun to school than teens who reported sleeping more than eight

hours. The elevated risk of handgun carrying stemming from restricted sleep was confined to teens who reported sleeping four or fewer hours a night.

Strategies to improve adolescent sleep should include comprehensive school-based programs that educate students and parents about the importance of sleep and effective sleep hygiene habits, Meldrum said.

Another possible solution being discussed at both the local and national level is moving [school](#) start times later in the morning, which has proven to not only improve sleep duration but may also contribute to a decline in delinquent behavior among teens, he said.

**More information:** Ryan Charles Meldrum et al. Sleep duration, handgun carrying, and taking a handgun to school: An analysis of a statewide sample of Florida youth, *Sleep Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleh.2019.11.008](#)

Provided by Florida International University

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