

Prevent Gun Violence

Firearms continue to be the number one factor in children and youth ages 0 to 19 years of age for the third year in a row ([Source](#).) Firearms account for 20% of all child and teen deaths in the U.S., compared to an average of less than 2% of child and teen deaths in similarly large and wealthy nations. The U.S. also has the highest rate of each type of child and teen firearm death—suicides, assaults, and unintentional or undetermined intent—among similarly large and wealthy countries ([KFF](#)). This is a public health emergency for children and teens, and it is past time that we treat it as one.

While Washington made significant strides last year in passing a series of laws aimed at enhancing public safety, including restricting access to assault weapons, ensuring victims of gun violence have access to justice, and implementing a 10-day waiting period and mandatory safety training for the purchase of all firearms, we must continue to advocate for innovative, evidence-based, common-sense policies that save lives.

Solution

Require a permit to purchase firearms.

Permit-to-purchase systems ensure that background checks occur before a firearm purchase rather than at the point of sale. This life-saving tool has been proven to reduce firearm-related deaths, curb illegal gun trafficking, and help ensure firearms don't fall into dangerous hands. Additionally, permitting provides an extra layer of safety by involving additional checks in the initial stages of firearm acquisition. Stronger state-level legislation is associated with lower state-level firearm prevalence and access ([JAMA](#)) and decreased firearm deaths in children and youth ([Pediatrics](#)).

Gun violence can adversely affect the mental health and well-being of children and youth. This exposure may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, in addition to other mental health concerns and substance use disorders ([Source](#)). Gun violence may also lead to challenges with school performance, including increased absenteeism and difficulty concentrating ([Source](#)).

Firearms are also an important cause of injury with long-term physical and mental health consequences. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends a multipronged harm reduction approach to reducing firearm injuries and death in children and youth, and names enacting legislation as essential for firearm injury prevention ([AAP](#) Policy Statement).