

Gun Violence: A Public Health Crisis

What Gun Violence Statistics Tell Us

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment recognizes gun violence is a public health crisis. As a nonprofit dedicated to the prevention of violence, the Institute's mission is to share information on this vital issue. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show the widespread impact on gun-related deaths:

- Gun violence results in **35,000** deaths each year, or a **death every 15 minutes**.
- On average, there are nearly **13,000** gun homicides a year in the U.S.
- For every person killed, **two** more are injured.
- Firearm-related violence is the **third** leading cause of death for children in the U.S. and the **12th** leading cause of death for Americans of all ages.

Though these statistics are devastating, they don't fully capture the catastrophic effects of gun violence, including the aftermath – the trauma of those who witness the shooting and may experience posttraumatic stress disorder, those who survive but suffer serious wounds and lasting pain, or the families and communities that are left with emotional injuries and long-term healing. Clearly, statistics tell only part of the story.

Laws for Gun Safety that Comply with the Second Amendment

After acknowledging the impact of gun violence, the next step is addressing the policies that impact this crisis. The incredible student organizers of the March for Our Lives released a policy agenda in total compliance with the Second Amendment to reduce the impact of gun violence in the United States ([Washington Post](#)). Many organizations, including the [American Medical Association](#) and the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#), have supported these policy points and added other recommendations. Here are some of the recommendations supported by The Melissa Institute:

1. Fund gun violence research.

Unlike other public health issues, gun violence is vastly underfunded and under-researched. Due to the Dickey Amendment, research publications related to gun violence fell more than 60% between 1998 and 2012. Research allows us the opportunity to understand and prevent the deadly impact of gun violence in our society. It is vital that we again fund appropriate research at the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention as part of the FY 2018 and 2019 omnibus spending package.

2. Require universal background checks.

Firearm regulations have many loopholes that allow individuals to purchase firearms. Currently, only federally licensed dealers are required to conduct background checks, and states frequently under-report to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) database. Private and unlicensed sellers are not regulated, which allows individuals to purchase firearms at gun shows and through unlicensed dealers on the internet.

3. Strengthen the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).
Eliminate current restrictions on the ATF to allow a searchable federal gun database.

4. Ban high-capacity magazines and assault weapons.
Create restrictions for civilian purchase of select weapons, including assault or military-style firearms, rapid-fire capacity (i.e., bump stocks), high-capacity magazines and armor-piercing or exploding bullets.

What can you do?

- Mid-term elections are in November. Know where candidates stand on gun safety and regulation and VOTE for the candidates who support your views on gun safety!
- Be knowledgeable about gun safety
 - Be SMART (Available at BeSMARTforKids.org)
 - Secure guns in homes and vehicles
 - Model responsible behavior
 - Ask about unsecured guns in other homes
 - Recognize the risks of teen suicide
 - Tell others to be SMART
- Know how to properly store weapons
 - Guns should be stored unloaded and kept in a secure cabinet, vault or safe.
 - Use trigger/gun locks.
 - Store ammunition in a locked location separate from firearms.
- If you work with clients or patients, it is your responsibility to ask if they have guns in their home and how they keep them stored.
- Support businesses that are advocating for gun safety restrictions. For example, Walmart, Dick's Sporting Goods, Kroger and L.L. Bean have raised the minimum purchase age to 21. Dick's has also announced that it will no longer sell assault-style weapons. Bank of America is cutting ties with companies responsible for the manufacture and sale of assault-type weapons. Citigroup will require new retail-sector clients to place restrictions on the sale of guns to anyone under the age of 21, to stop selling bump stocks and high-capacity magazines and to perform background checks. Other companies, such as Delta, have ended ties with the National Rifle Association. It is noted that Wells Fargo is the largest financier in the nation of the gun industry and is the main bank for the National Rifle Association.

Marches and school walkouts create an outlet and platform for courageous youth and their supporters to demand change. These movements bring people together to highlight the impact of gun violence. They promote discussions about mass shootings, school shootings, urban and community violence, unintentional injuries and suicides. Bringing awareness and standing up to be heard is just the beginning. The next step is to use your vote to ensure that Congress, state and local representatives pass legislation that prevents gun violence, saves lives and promotes safer communities.