

AAP renews commitment to preventing gun injuries in children

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The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is renewing its call to reduce the destructive effects of guns in the lives of children and adolescents, including counseling parents about safe gun storage as well as supporting legislation to prevent firearm injuries and deaths.

According to the AAP, the safest home for children and teens is one without [guns](#). If there are guns in the home, scientific evidence shows the risk of injury or death is greatly reduced when they are stored unloaded and locked, with the [ammunition](#) locked in a separate place. Pediatricians routinely offer this injury-prevention counseling as part of their guidance to families at health care visits.

"Firearm injuries are often fatal – there are few second chances," said Marion Burton, MD, FAAP, immediate past president of the AAP.

"Young children are curious, and are often unable to remember or follow safety rules. Older children and teens naturally tend to be moody and impulsive. When you combine these traits with access to guns, the consequences can be tragic and permanent."

The policy statement, "Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population," will be published online in *Pediatrics* Thursday, Oct. 18 in advance of the AAP National Conference and Exhibition Oct. 20-23 in New Orleans. The policy will appear in the November 2012 print issue of *Pediatrics*. The statement updates a previous policy statement published in 2000.

While the rate of firearm-related deaths has declined over the past two decades, it is still one of the top three causes of death in American youth, far exceeding the rates in other high-income countries. An estimated 38 percent of American households own guns; in gun-owning households with children under age 18, many of those guns are stored loaded and/or unlocked. The presence of guns in the home increases the risk of death from suicide or [homicide](#).

Strong scientific evidence suggests that the presence of a gun in the home of an adolescent increases the risk of suicide, even in the absence of a psychiatric diagnosis, said pediatrician Denise Dowd, MD, FAAP, one of the lead authors of the statement who will be discussing the recommendations in a session at the AAP meeting in New Orleans Oct. 20.

"[Adolescents](#) often experience very strong emotions and have difficulty seeing past a temporary setback," Dr. Dowd said. "Their brains have not matured fully, which makes them impulsive, and relatively more likely to attempt suicide. When those attempts are made with a gun, there is little chance for them to change their minds. The odds of suicide are particularly high if the gun is kept loaded. It is absolutely critical that families who own guns follow safe-storage practices."

Firearm-related injuries and deaths can be prevented when guns are stored safely away from children and adolescents in a locked case. Because of the severe, permanent nature of gun injuries in children, the AAP supports the strongest-possible legislative and regulatory approaches to reduce the accessibility of guns to [children](#) and adolescents:

- Consumer product regulations regarding child access, safety and design of guns

- Child access prevention laws that enforce safe storage practices including the use of trigger locks, lock boxes, and gun safes
- Regulation of the purchase of guns, including mandatory waiting periods, closure of the gun show loophole, mental health restrictions for gun purchases, and background checks
- Restoration of the ban on the sale of assault weapons to the general public

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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