

US gun violence: Murders down, suicides up, CDC reports

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Limiting access to guns is the only solution, expert says.

(HealthDay)—Fewer people in America's largest cities are being murdered by guns, but the rate of suicide by gun has increased in recent years, U.S. health officials said Thursday.

The report on gun violence from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that the overall gun-murder rate dropped by about 15 percent overall between 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 in a majority of the nation's 50 largest cities.

However, the suicide-by-gun rate rose 10 to 15 percent in nearly three-quarters of those cities during the same time frame.

"There is good news and concerning news in this article," said report co-author James Mercy, of the [violence prevention](#) division within the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

The rate of gun murders at the hands of youths aged 10 to 19 exceeded gun murders by adults, and accounted for nearly 3,400 firearm killings in 2009-2010. More than 1,500 teens and preteens took their own lives by gun in that time period, according to the findings, published in the Aug. 2 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

In total, more than 22,500 gun murders and more than 38,000 gun suicides were tallied for 2009-2010, the researchers found.

Overall, "the firearm homicide rate has actually declined for the three years that we covered in this study. And this is consistent with the long-term decline that we witnessed in firearm [homicide rates](#) in the U.S.," said Mercy. He credited police efforts to curb [gang violence](#) and the healthier U.S. economy for improvements in the overall rate of gun murders.

Suicides by gun jumped almost 2 percentage points in Oklahoma City and from less than 8 percent to more than 9 percent in the Tampa, Fla., area. In Salt Lake City, gun suicides climbed to more than 11 percent from less than 9 percent in the earlier [gun-violence](#) report.

"Guns are the most prevalent form of suicide in the United States," Mercy said. This increase in gun suicides is part of an overall upturn in people killing themselves, he added.

Unemployment and other economic factors related to the recent recession have been cited in the overall increase in suicides, he noted.

The grim statistics highlight the need for stricter gun restrictions, one expert said.

"If there is any question that gun control is a big problem, here's a good example of why," said Dr. Victor Fornari, chief of child and adolescent

psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y.

"Access to firearms is a serious public health problem," he said. "Limiting access to firearms would reduce homicide as well as suicide. As long as guns are available there are going to be these violent outcomes."

Mercy thinks violence prevention is key. "One area where we have made a lot of progress is in preventing youth violence," he said.

Programs for teens that teach skills for conflict-resolution have been effective, he noted. And programs that focus on family cohesion and proper supervision are also beneficial, Mercy said.

Neighborhood watch programs also help stem violence, Mercy added.

Cities that have seen gun murders decline include New Orleans, where the rate fell from 23 percent to 19 percent; the Los Angeles area, with a drop from 6 percent to just over 4 percent; and Richmond, Va., where gun murders dropped from 7.4 percent to less than 6 percent.

Suicides are more difficult to prevent than gun murders, Mercy said. This involves identifying people at risk and getting them help and making them feel less isolated, he explained.

Overall, safe gun storage is essential for cutting down on murders and suicides. "Everyone believes in the value of storing firearms safely," he said.

Additional research is needed to assess the value of other preventive strategies, the CDC authors stated. These might include waiting periods to curtail impulsive suicidal behavior, improving gun-design safety and conducting background checks to prevent high-risk individuals from

obtaining deadly weapons.

More information: For more information on preventing gun violence, visit the [Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#).

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