

More teens dying, with drugs and violence to blame

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(HealthDay)—A perfect storm of murder, addiction and carelessness has

fueled a recent and troubling increase in deaths among U.S. children and teens, a new government report shows.

The total [death](#) rate for those aged 10 to 19 rose 12 percent between 2013 and 2016, mostly due to an increase in deaths from accidental injury, homicide and suicide, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found.

In short, the United States is becoming less safe for teenagers.

The primary causes of [injury deaths](#) were [motor vehicle accidents](#), suicide, firearms-related murders and drug overdoses, the report discovered.

"For children in the U.S., the rate of deaths has increased recently, and it's from a multitude of these injury death causes," said report author Sally Curtin, a statistician with the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics. "You can't just say it's suicide or homicide. It really is a combination of causes."

The death rate among kids aged 10 to 19 was 33.1 deaths per 100,000 children in 2016, up from 29.6 deaths per 100,000 in 2013, according to the report.

The increase comes after more than a decade of improved child safety. Between 1999 and 2013, the death rate for kids in this age range declined by 33 percent.

But in recent years, the trend reversed course:

- Unintentional injuries increased 13 percent between 2013 and 2016, after declining 49 percent between 1999 and 2013.

- Suicide rates increased 56 percent between 2007 and 2016, after dropping 15 percent between 1999 and 2007.
- Homicide rates increased 27 percent between 2014 and 2016, after declining 35 percent between 2007 and 2014.

Firearms, the opioid crisis and [traffic crashes](#) are playing central roles in these increases, the researchers said.

Gun violence accounted for 87 percent of all homicides and 43 percent of all suicides for kids aged 10 to 19, the findings showed.

At the same time, [drug overdoses](#) caused 90 percent of all poisoning deaths among these children, hitting older teens the hardest, Curtin said.

The findings were reported June 1 in the CDC's *National Vital Statistics Reports*.

These numbers reflect a "confluence of trends" that endanger children's lives in America, said Dr. David Katz, founding director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center.

"Recent studies highlight the rising prevalence of both depression and opioid abuse in the U.S. Combine these with yet another feature of American life—the ubiquity of guns—and there is a potent and ominous mix. This report highlights the grim consequences," Katz said.

"Desperation and drugs combine to foment assaults on oneself, and others," he continued. "When guns are the tool applied, both such assaults are more often lethal."

Traffic crashes were the leading cause of injury death among kids and teens in 2016. Motor vehicles caused 7.4 deaths per 100,000 youths,

followed by suicide (6 deaths per 100,000), homicide (4.7 deaths per 100,000) and poisoning (2 deaths per 100,000).

Driving or walking while distracted by a smartphone or other electronic device is also contributing to traffic deaths among these young people, said Morag MacKay, director of research for Safe Kids Worldwide.

"We also know a large proportion of kids in this age group, in the event they are killed in a crash, are found not to be wearing a seat belt," MacKay said.

Other research has shown that about half of kids aged 15 to 19 and 43 percent of kids aged 9 to 13 aren't wearing a seat belt during their fatal crash, MacKay said.

"We need people to be wearing their seat belts," MacKay said. "We need them to put down their phone and focus on driving or walking."

MacKay and Katz agreed that there's no single way to improve child safety in the United States.

"The only proper response to this report is a dedicated effort to remedy all components of the problem," Katz said. "We need better, early detection of depression and drug misuse in young people, and effective, compassionate treatment when we find it," he advised.

"And we need to do far more to keep guns out of the hands of desperate people," Katz continued. "Guns tend to make suicide and homicide attempts more likely to succeed, and that variety of success is a public health failure of the first order."

More information: Sally Curtin, M.A., statistician, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics;

David Katz, M.D., MPH, founding director, Yale University Prevention Research Center; Morag MacKay, MSc, director, research, Safe Kids Worldwide; June 1, 2018, CDC's *National Vital Statistics Reports*

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [youth violence prevention](#).

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