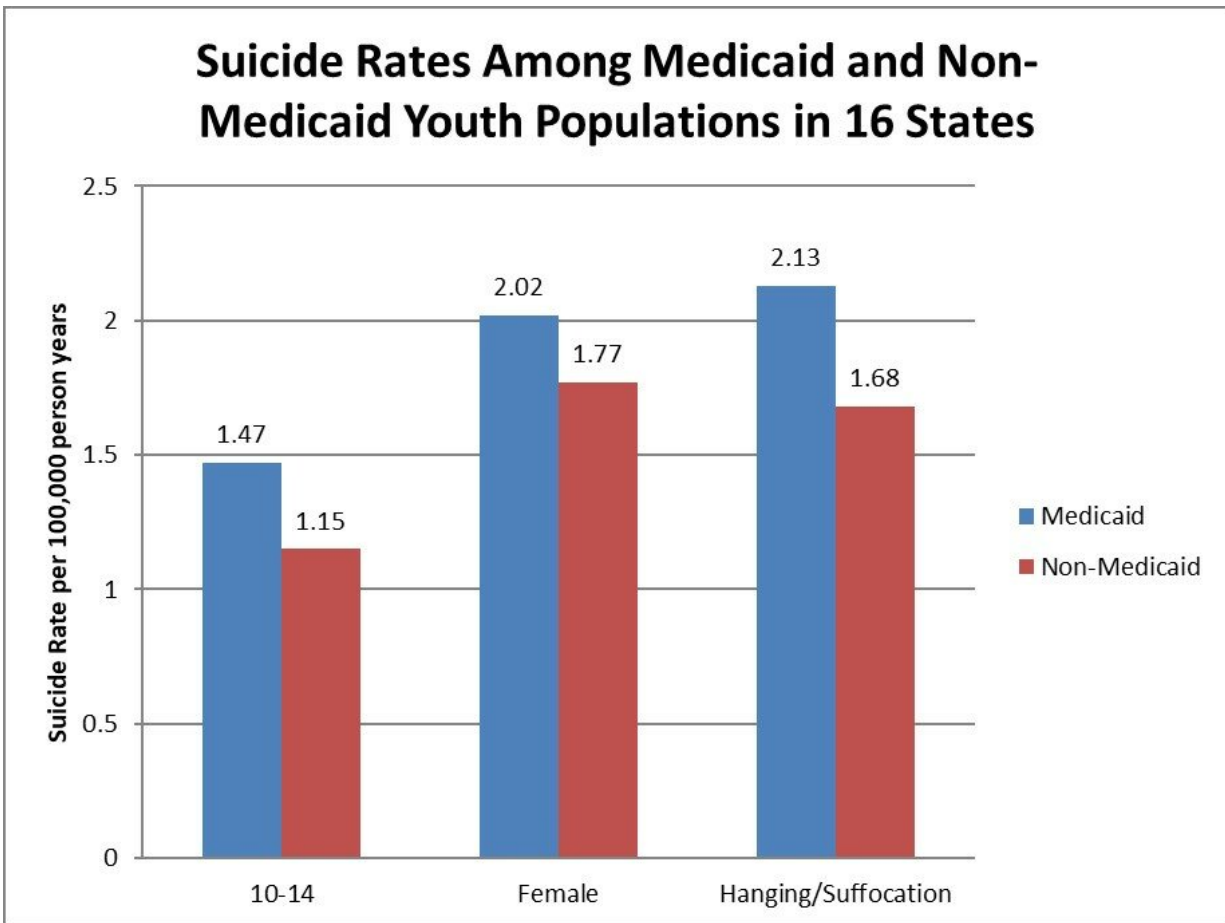


# US youth suicides more prevalent in states with higher gun ownership

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While the overall suicide rate did not significantly differ between the groups, compared with the non-Medicaid group, the suicide rate in the Medicaid group was significantly higher among youth aged 10 to 14 years, females (regardless of age), and those who died by hanging. Credit: *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*

A new study led by Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) researchers finds that states with higher levels of household gun ownership also have higher overall youth suicide rates, with every 10 percentage-point increase in household gun ownership associated with a 26.9 percent increase in the youth suicide rate.

Published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, the study is the first to examine the relationship between household gun ownership and [youth](#) suicide rates while controlling for differences in the rate of youth suicide attempts across states.

"The availability of firearms is contributing to an increase in the actual number of suicides, not just leading youth to substitute other means of suicide for guns," says BUSPH predoctoral fellow Anita Knopov, the study's lead author.

The researchers used data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on suicides by youth between the ages of 10 and 19 years old from 2005 to 2015. They also used state-level data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) to control for rates of risk behaviors as well as other factors associated with suicide, such as race, family constellation, poverty, education, and urbanicity.

The researchers found the overall youth suicide rate from 2005 to 2015 ranged from a high of 15 youth suicides per 100,000 people in Alaska to a low of 3 per 100,000 people in New Jersey. In the 10 states with the highest youth suicide rates, the average household gun ownership was 52.5 percent, compared to a household gun ownership rate of 20 percent in the 10 states with the lowest youth suicide rates.

"This study demonstrates that the strongest single predictor of a state's youth [suicide](#) rate is the prevalence of household gun [ownership](#) in that state," says study co-author Michael Siegel, professor of community

health sciences at BUSPH.

**More information:** "A National Comparison of Suicide Among Medicaid and Non-Medicaid Youth,"  
[doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.10.008)

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