

U.S. murder rate up 30% during pandemic, highest one-year rise ever

October 6 2021, by Robert Preidt and Ernie Mundell



(HealthDay)—The rate at which homicide is taking the lives of

Americans jumped by 30% over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic—the largest year-to-year increase ever, new federal government figures show.

The rate jumped from 6 homicides per 100,000 people in 2019 to 7.8 per 100,000 in 2020, according to provisional data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

The previous largest year-to-year increase was a 20% increase from 2000 to 2001, and that rise was largely driven by the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks, when nearly 3,000 people perished.

The new figures didn't come as a surprise to one emergency medicine doctor.

"Emergency physicians are continuing to follow an increasingly worrisome upward trend in violence in the United States over the past year," said Dr. Teresa Murray Amato, who wasn't involved in the CDC report.

"It is unclear what impact the [pandemic](#) has had on these trends and more research will need to be done to better understand why this is happening," said Amato, who directs emergency medicine at Long Island Jewish Forest Hills, in New York City.

The NCHS findings on the sharp rise in [homicide](#) rates between 2019 and 2020 are consistent with recent findings by the U.S. Department of Justice.

How much of the uptick in murders can be blamed on the pandemic and its stressors? One psychiatrist believes COVID-19 fears and lockdowns have played a key role.

"The pandemic disrupted our daily lives abruptly and to an unprecedented extent, causing changes in everything from [physical activity](#) to patterns of socialization, which have then had physiological as well as emotional/psychological effects," said Dr. Timothy Sullivan. He's chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Staten Island University Hospital, also in New York City.

As people lost jobs, financial strains came to the fore, too.

"The [economic consequences](#) of the pandemic greatly increased strain on families, but disproportionately, so that suffering, while widespread, was especially great for some," Sullivan said. He also pointed to statistics showing a rise in [substance abuse](#) and a steady rise in incidents of domestic violence over the past 18 months.

The new data do not break down *how* murders are being committed, but the CDC said that provisional data on firearm injury death rates show an increase in firearm deaths from 11.9 per 100,000 in 2019 to 13.6 per 100,000 in 2020—a 14% increase.

"This volatile combination of emotional, financial and physical stress, combined with substance use and the too-ready availability of handguns in our society—which has been shown to increase the likelihood of shooting deaths associated with intimate partner violence—could understandably lead to an increased homicide rate," Sullivan believes.

The CDC stressed that even though the recent uptick in murders is startling, Americans today still have lower odds of dying from homicide than they did in decades past.

Although the homicide rate during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic is the highest since 1995, it is still significantly lower than rates in the early 1980s, the CDC noted. During those years, U.S.

homicides averaged more than 10 per 100,000 people.

Follow-up analyses from the NCHS will offer more insight on the 2020 increases in homicide, including how they're committed, demographic details and state-level information, the CDC team said.

More information: Go to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on [homicides](#).

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Citation: U.S. murder rate up 30% during pandemic, highest one-year rise ever (2021, October 6) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-pandemic-highest-one-year.html>

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