Medical Xpress

One in five Colorado high school students has access to firearms

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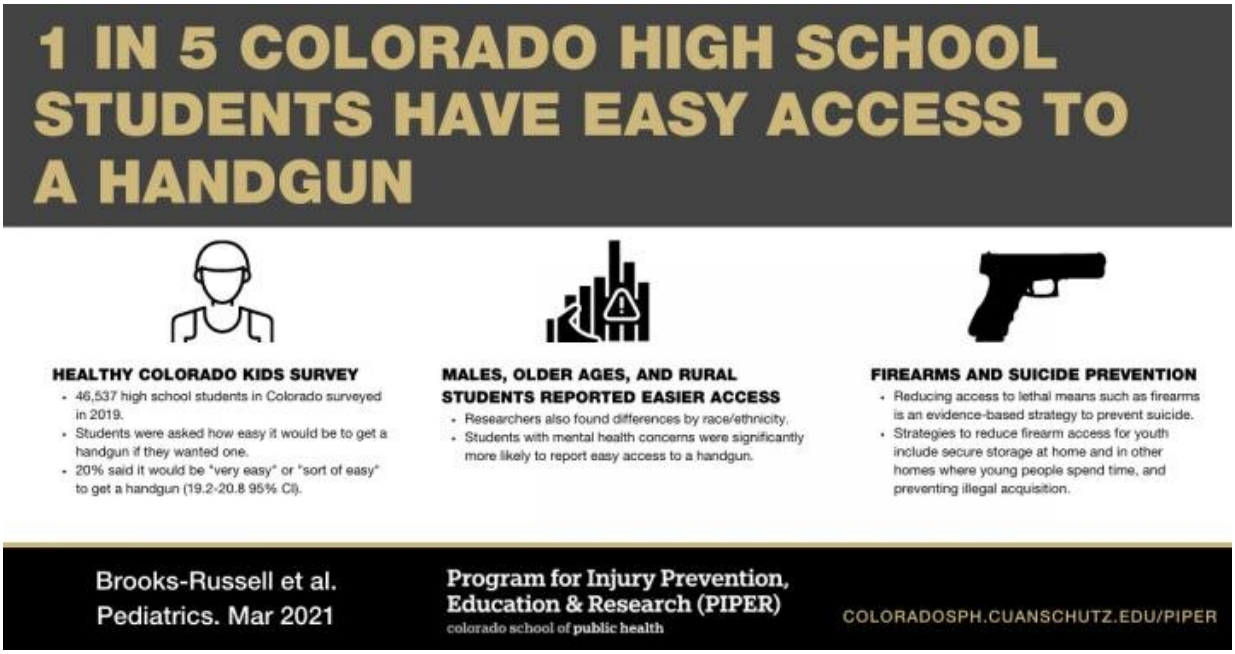

Firearm Access in Colorado. Credit: CU Anschutz Medical Camppus

Twenty percent of high school students have easy access to a handgun, according to a new study from the Colorado School of Public Health on the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

In the study published today in *Pediatrics*, the researchers examined the prevalence of handgun access among adolescents in Colorado and explored individual and geographic characteristics, as well as related

health factors.

"Our findings highlight that it is relatively easy to access a handgun in Colorado for high school students. This finding, combined with the high prevalence of feeling sad or depressed and suicide attempts, is concerning for the safety of adolescents," said lead author Ashley Brooks-Russell, Ph.D., MPH, assistant professor in the Colorado School of Public Health.

The researchers examined data from more than 46,000 students who completed the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, a voluntary statewide anonymous survey given to students in participating schools across Colorado. The survey results are used to assess health behaviors, risk and protective factors. In this study, the researchers reviewed survey questions about the perception of access to handguns.

They found that students were significantly more likely to report easy handgun access if they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks (24.2%), had attempted suicide (30.1%) or had been in a physical fight in the past 12 months (31.8 %).

The survey data also revealed:

- More male than female high school students reported handgun access.
- A significantly higher proportion of transgender youth reported access.
- Students in more rural areas are more likely to have access.
- American Indian, multiracial students, followed by white students, access to handguns was significantly higher than among Hispanic, Black or African American or Asian American students.

"It's clear from our findings that we need to raise awareness and improve efforts to reduce firearm access for youth in Colorado to prevent suicide and fatal injuries," said Brooks-Russell. "We hope our findings will help inform public health strategies, such as educating parents on the importance of secure home firearm storage, particularly if an adolescent is at risk for suicide."

Recently, Colorado lawmakers advanced the Safe Storage of Firearms bill to require Colorado gun owners who share their homes with children to securely store their weapons. It passed its first committee on a party line vote.

There are also several gun shops and law enforcement agencies in Colorado that offer out-of-home gun storage options, if home gun storage is not a viable option. Faculty members at the Colorado School of Public Health announced the first out-of-home gun storage map in the country.

The researchers recommend future studies to explore where students access guns (at home or outside their house) and to look at their attempts to access them.

More information: Ashley Brooks-Russell et al. Perceived Access to Handguns Among Colorado High School Students, *Pediatrics* (2021). DOI: 10.1542/peds.2020-015834 , pediatrics.aappublications.org … /25/peds.2020-015834

Provided by CU Anschutz Medical Campus

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