A Public Health Approach To Reducing Firearm Injury

Massachusetts Medical Society
12th Annual Public Health Leadership Forum
Firearm Violence: Policy, Prevention & Public Health
April 5, 2016

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, MACP, FACEP (E), FNAPA
Executive Director
American Public Health Association

Objectives

• Define the societal toll of firearm related injury;
• Articulate the public health approach to reducing gun violence and;
• Name three broad approaches to reduce firearm related injury and death.
Conflict of Interests

I do not have any to declare

The Gun Violence Paradox

We Fear It
We Normalize It Through Entertainment

They Are A Part of Our Culture
We Believe They Can Protect Us

But Far Too Often This Happens
Or This...........

Sandy Hook Elementary School, December 14, 2012, Newtown, Conn.

.........And This
And..... Tragically This One

Boy, 7, dies after accidental shooting by another child in Crossville parking lot

CROSSVILLE (WATE) – A seven-year-old boy has died after being shot by another child inside a parked car in Crossville Monday afternoon, police say.

The Crossville Police Department says four children were left alone inside a car in the parking lot of a Verizon store around 3:15 p.m. while their mother and stepfather went inside to pay a bill. The family is from White County.

One child found a semi-automatic pistol left inside the mother’s purse and accidentally shot a 7-year-old boy also in the car, according to police, while trying to remove the magazine to unload it.

Police found the boy bleeding from his head. He was flown to a Knoxville trauma center for medical treatment where police say he died.

Officials are calling the incident a tragic accidental shooting, but are still investigating. Police say they are still conducting interviews and that this investigation is going to take a very long time because they want to be right. As soon as their investigation is complete, they’ll turn it over to a prosecutor who will determine whether the parents will face any charges.


The Societal Toll

APHA
This Is A True Epidemic

91 Americans are killed with guns on average each day
Over 33,000 annually

We Kill Our Intimate Partners

In an average month, 51 women are shot to death by intimate partners in the U.S.
Our Youth Are Dying At Unacceptable Rates

At least 7 kids a day

There Is A Huge Racial Disparity

U.S. gun deaths by race and gender, 2011-2013

Note: These figures have all been calculated using a 2011-2013 average to smooth single-year fluctuations.
Source: CDC Injury Prevention & Control database.

Mass Shootings Are A Persistent Issue

- More days with mass shootings than not
- In 209 out of 336 days this year, at least one shooting left four or more people injured or dead in the United States, according to compilations of incidents derived from news reports.

- The number of Americans injured with firearms dwarfs the number who are killed
- More than 200 non-fatal firearm injuries daily
- The number of non-fatal gunshot wounds rose 50% between 2002 and 2011
Cost Of Firearm & Death

- $229 billion or $12.8 million a day
  - Medical treatment
  - Legal fees
  - Long term care
  - Mental health
  - Emergency service
  - Security
  - Law enforcement
  - Lost income

We Have Lots Of Guns

More guns than people
Number of civilian firearms in the U.S. versus total U.S. population

More Guns In Less Hands

Gun ownership is declining

% of households with guns, 1973 – 2014

Source: General Social Survey

The Second Amendment

Firearms as a right – But with Limits

The 2nd Amendment

A well regulated militia being necessary for the security of a free state; the right of the people to keep and bear arms Shall not be infringed

Supreme Court Ruled

District of Columbia v. Heller

- The 2nd amendment is an individual right
- Certain gun laws are still valid
The Protective Safety Of Guns Is Overestimated

• Homicide of household member is 3 times more likely & risk of suicide is 5 times more likely *
• A gun in the home increases a woman’s risk of intimate partner homicide 7 times **
• 21% of law enforcement officers killed with a handgun were shot with their own weapon ***

** Bailey, JE, et al., Archives of Internal Medicine, 1997
The Public Health Approach

- Define the Problem
- Identify Risk and Protective Factors
- Develop and Test Prevention Strategies
- Assure Widespread Adoption

Approach To Reducing Automobile Injury & Death

- Made cars safer
- Made people safer in their cars
- Made the environment safer for cars & people

Multidisciplinary, multisector approach
A Public Health Approach To Reducing Gun Injury

- Make guns safer
- Make people safer with their guns
- Make people safer in an environment with guns in it
Making Guns Safer

• Gun Safety Technology
  – Smart gun (Fingerprint activation)
  – RFID technology
• Integrated trigger locks
• Chamber load indicators
• Magazine disconnect devices
• Reduce the lethality of guns
  – Military style assault weapons
  – Ammunition clip size

Making People Safer With Their Guns

• Increased Access to Mental Health Services
• Nonviolent confrontation
• Firearm safety classes – Mandatory
• Licensing with renewals
• Broad public health education
• Physician counseling
• Locking up guns & ammunition separately
A Safer Environment With Guns

• Limits on those who should not have access to guns
  – Universal Background checks
  – Domestic violence laws
• Reduce the number of guns
• Implement consumer & product safety oversight
• Have safe storage requirements
• Trauma network & spinal cord injury centers
• Counseling programs for victims to reduce violence cycle
• Creation of youth activity programs
• Common sense gun laws

A Robust Research Enterprise Is Essential
Functional Ban On Federal Research On Gun Injury

- CDC had been “prohibited” from intervening or from supporting firearm-related violence research since at least 1996 – Later NIH added
- Not an explicit prohibition, but could not support any activity that would advocate or promote gun control
- Was interpreted as including “research”
- 1996 Appropriations Bill took $2.6 million out of CDC budget and earmarked it for traumatic brain injury
- 2013 spending on firearm-related research estimated at only $100,000

About APHA

APHA is a global community of public health professionals and the collective voice for the health of the public. APHA is the only organization that combines 140 years of perspective, a broad-based constituency and the ability to influence federal policy to advocate for and improve the public’s health.

- Founded – April 18, 1872
- 501C(3) & Nonpartisan
- Over 50,000 individual & affiliate members