

Beat: Business

1 in 5 suicidal U.S. youths have guns in their home

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USPA News - Nearly one in five American children and teens found to be at risk for suicide report that there are guns in their homes, and fifteen percent of those have access to both the guns and the bullets, according to the results of a study released on Monday. Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 10 and 24, and nearly half of them were carried out with the use of a firearm.

It results in approximately 4,600 deaths each year. Researchers from the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) presented Monday the results of a study which sought to create a suicide risk screening tool that health care professionals in emergency departments (EDs) could use to figure out which youths need further mental health evaluation to keep them from harming themselves. "For more than 1.5 million adolescents, the ED is their primary point of contact with the health care system, which makes the ED an important place for identifying youth at risk for suicide," said Stephen Teach, associate chief in the Division of Emergency Medicine at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C. and the co-author of the study. Researchers asked youths between the ages of 10 and 21 about access to guns in or around their home and whether they had access to both the guns and bullets. The results showed 29 percent of participants were found to be at risk for suicide, of which 17 percent reported that guns were being kept in their homes. Of those at risk for suicide and reporting guns in their home, 31 percent said they knew how to access the guns, 31 percent knew how to access the bullets, and 15 percent knew how to access both the guns and the bullets. "This study highlights the importance of parents understanding the risks of having guns in their homes," said co-author and youth suicide expert Jeffrey Bridge, principal investigator at The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Being at risk for suicide and having access to firearms is a volatile mix. These conversations need to take place in the ED with families of children at risk for suicide." Lisa Horowitz, staff scientist/pediatric psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health, said many clinicians and parents do not know how to ask youth about suicide and said they require screening tools to assist in detection. "According to our data, when asked their opinion, nearly all of the kids in our study were in favor of suicide screening in the ED. Our study shows that if you ask kids directly about suicide, they will tell you what they are thinking," she said.

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