Keeping Children Safe: Preventing Gun Violence

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is dedicated to protecting children from gun violence. In the wake of the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., the Academy is pursuing strong federal policies to help children feel and be safe in their homes, schools and communities.

**Gun violence is a public health issue that profoundly affects children.**
- Firearms are one of the top three causes of death among youth, causing twice as many deaths as cancer, five times as many as heart disease and 15 times as many as infections.
- Federal agencies should be able to conduct gun safety research, without any funding restrictions, to determine which programs and interventions are most effective.

**Pediatricians play a crucial role in preventing gun injury and violence.**
- AAP’s Bright Futures clinical guidance recommends that pediatricians ask about guns in the home and provide age-appropriate safety counseling, similar to counseling on other injury risks, like drowning and parental tobacco use.
- Physician counseling, combined with the distribution of gun locks, increases safe gun storage. AAP welcomes President Obama’s clarification that the Affordable Care Act does not prevent doctors from asking their patients about guns in the home.

**Bipartisan efforts are needed to protect children from the destructive effects of guns.**
- AAP supports legislation that would ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and require universal background checks and safe firearm storage.
- The Academy has endorsed Sen. Dianne Feinstein’s (D-Calif.) Assault Weapons Regulatory Act of 2013 (S. 150) and supports President Obama’s initiative to promote safe and responsible gun ownership.

**Children and adolescents need access to quality mental health services.**
- Inadequate insurance coverage and high out-of-pocket costs prevent children from accessing needed mental health services.
- Treatment of many mental disorders has been deemed highly effective, but without intervention, child and adolescent psychiatric disorders frequently continue into adulthood.

**Exposure to violence in the home and in the media negatively affects children.**
- Extensive research finds that exposure to media violence contributes to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares and the fear of being harmed.
- AAP’s policy statement on toxic stress notes the well-demonstrated relationships between childhood trauma, including exposure to violence, and the presence of adult diseases. Reducing children’s exposure to violence in the media and investing in early childhood education programs can help protect children’s health across the lifespan.

### Support strong federal policies that keep children safe

Now is the time to pass comprehensive legislation to keep children safe. Please support efforts to prevent gun violence, invest in gun safety research, ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, increase access to mental health services and reduce children’s exposure to violence.

*For more information, please contact Sonya Clay in the AAP Washington Office: 202.347.8600 or sclay@aap.org*