

# US gun violence increased 30 percent during COVID-19 pandemic

October 21 2021

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Gun violence increased by more than 30% in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study by Penn State College of Medicine researchers. The researchers said that stress, domestic violence, lack of social interactions and greater access to firearms might have contributed to the increase.

According to the researchers, these findings come at a time when many hospitals remain inundated with COVID-19 cases and face challenges related to [limited resources](#), such as blood products, intensive care beds, personal protective equipment and staffing. They said gun violence increases the burden on health care systems that are already in high demand. The researchers also warn that if gun-related incidents continue to rise, hospitals may experience additional strain.

The researchers obtained data on shooting deaths, suicides and gun-related injuries from the Gun Violence Archive. They analyzed daily incidents in each state, as well as the District of Columbia, from February 2019 through March 2021. They compared incidents reported before the pandemic (February 2019 through February 2020) to gun violence reported during the first year of the pandemic (March 2020 through March 2021).

According to the findings, 28 states, including Pennsylvania, experienced a significantly higher number of shootings during the first year of the pandemic. In some states such as Minnesota, Michigan and New York, the rate of gun violence rose by more than 100%. Meanwhile, Alaska was the only state to see significantly lower rates of gun [violence](#) during the pandemic.

According to the researchers, added stress and worry, along with fear and uncertainty may have fueled an increase in gun sales. Based on data from the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, there was a 41% increase in handguns sold in March 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. According to the researchers, all of these factors may have led to the increase in gun-related injuries and deaths during the pandemic.

"The pandemic has yielded harmful ripple effects that need to be addressed," said co-lead investigator Dr. Paddy Ssentongo, assistant

professor at the Penn State Center for Neural Engineering. "The spike in [gun violence](#) in the era of COVID-19 comes as a stark reminder that we can't afford to ignore it any longer. Now is the time to focus on this public health crisis."

"Our data reinforces the need to promote multiple interventions—vaccinations, testing, contact tracing, masking and ventilation—to mitigate the COVID-19 [pandemic](#), and in doing so, hopefully we can mitigate the downstream effects," said co-investigator Dr. Jennifer McCall-Hosenfeld, associate professor, Departments of Medicine and Public Health Sciences.

The study published today in *Scientific Reports*.

Penn State researchers Anna Ssentongo, Emily Heilbrunn, Dr. Joshua Hazelton, Dr. John Oh and Vernon Chinchilli contributed to this research. Claudio Fronterre from Lancaster University and Dr. Shailesh Advani from Georgetown University School of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health also contributed to this research.

**More information:** Paddy Ssentongo, Gun violence incidence during the COVID-19 pandemic is higher than before the pandemic in the United States, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-98813-z](#).  
[www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-98813-z](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-98813-z)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: US gun violence increased 30 percent during COVID-19 pandemic (2021, October 21) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-gun-violence-percent-covid-pandemic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.