

Understanding Youth Violence

Fact Sheet

2012

Youth violence refers to harmful behaviors that can start early and continue into young adulthood. The young person can be a victim, an offender, or a witness to the violence.

Youth violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts—such as bullying, slapping, or hitting—can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. Others, such as robbery and assault (with or without weapons), can lead to serious injury or even death.



Why is youth violence a public health problem?

Youth violence is widespread in the United States (U.S.). It is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 24.¹

- 4,828 young people aged 10 to 24 were victims of homicide—an average of 13 each day—in 2010.¹
- Over 707,000 young people aged 10 to 24 years had physical assault injuries treated in U.S. emergency departments in 2011—an average of 1,938 each day.¹
- In a 2011 nationwide survey, about 33% of high school students reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey.²
- About 5% of high school students in 2011 reported taking a weapon to school in the 30 days before the survey.²
- In 2011, 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property and 16% reported being bullied electronically.²
- Each year, youth homicides and assault-related injuries result in an estimated \$16 billion in combined medical and work loss costs.¹



How does youth violence affect health?

Deaths resulting from youth violence are only part of the problem. Many young people need medical care for violence-related injuries. These injuries can include cuts, bruises, broken bones, and gunshot wounds. Some injuries, like gunshot wounds, can lead to lasting disabilities.

Violence can also affect the health of communities. It can increase health care costs, decrease property values, and disrupt social services.³



Who is at risk for youth violence?

A number of factors can increase the risk of a youth engaging in violence. However, the presence of these factors does not always mean that a young person will become an offender.

Risk factors for youth violence include:

- Prior history of violence
- Drug, alcohol, or tobacco use
- Association with delinquent peers
- Poor family functioning
- Poor grades in school
- Poverty in the community

Note: This is a partial list of risk factors. For more information, see www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention.

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How can we prevent youth violence?

The ultimate goal is to stop youth violence before it starts. Several prevention strategies have been identified.

- Parent- and family-based programs improve family relations. Parents receive training on child development. They also learn skills for talking with their kids and solving problems in nonviolent ways.
- Social-development strategies teach children how to handle tough social situations. They learn how to resolve problems without using violence.
- Mentoring programs pair an adult with a young person. The adult serves as a positive role model and helps guide the young person's behavior.
- Changes can be made to the physical and social environment. These changes address the social and economic causes of violence.



How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a four-step approach to address public health problems like youth violence.

Step 1: Define the problem

Before we can prevent youth violence, we need to know how big the problem is, where it is, and who it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data. These data are critical because they help us know where prevention is most needed.

Step 2: Identify risk and protective factors

It is not enough to know that youth violence is affecting a certain group of children in a certain area. We also need to know why. CDC conducts and supports research to answer this question. We can then develop programs to reduce or get rid of risk factors and increase protective factors.

Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies

Using information gathered in research, CDC develops and evaluates strategies to prevent youth violence.

Step 4: Ensure widespread adoption

In this final step, CDC shares the best prevention strategies. CDC may also provide funding or technical help so communities can adopt these strategies.

For a list of CDC activities, see *Preventing Youth Violence: Program Activities Guide* (www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/preventingyv.html).



Where can I learn more?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

CDC Facebook Page on Violence Prevention

www.facebook.com/vetoviolence

STRYVE

www.vetoviolence.org/stryve/home.html

Stop Bullying

www.stopbullying.gov

Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence

www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence



References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2010) [cited 2012 Oct 19]. Available from www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2011. *MMWR, Surveillance Summaries* 2012;61(no. SS-4).
3. Mercy J, Butchart A, Farrington D, Cerdá M. Youth violence. In: Krug E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R, editors. *The World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2002. p. 25–56.