

A Statement on the Parkland, Florida Shooting

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Outrage. Heartbreak. Frustration. These are just a few of the emotions I experience every time I see a child who has been senselessly injured or killed by bullets.

These are the emotions undoubtedly many of us felt recently when 17 students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida were shot and killed by a troubled young man.

This is the 30th mass shooting this year. Sadly, 424 children aged 0-17 have been killed or injured by a firearm so far in 2018.

A 2016 article published in the American Journal of Medicine noted that, among high-income nations, 91 percent of children younger than 15 who were killed by firearms lived in the United States.

On average, 23 kids were shot each day in 2015, according to data reviewed by the Washington Post.

MNAAP believes that firearm violence is a serious public health issue. Policy makers can no longer ignore this issue. Not when firearm-related deaths are one of the top three causes of death in American youth. We join the AAP and dozens of other physician groups in strongly urging Congress to end the prohibition on research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on meaningful research on gun violence.

As pediatricians, we are tasked with caring for the most vulnerable of our citizens: our nation's children. We are horrified by the carnage wrought on children and mourn with their families. We wonder when this horror will end. What will it take for Congress to act to protect our children? What will it take for all our nation's politicians to act in the interest of all their constituents and not be beholden to special interest groups like the National Rifle Association? When will we all agree that enough is enough?

The time is well past for meaningful legislation at the state and federal level aimed at curbing gun violence. This is not about rights afforded citizens under the 2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The vast majority of Americans agree with commonsense gun laws that will help to keep guns out of the hands of those that should not have access to guns, including those with mental illness and criminals. The vast majority of Americans also agree with comprehensive background checks, and limits on assault-style weapons.

Firearm safety begins at home. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that about one-third of American children live in homes with a firearm, and 43 percent of those contain at least one unlocked gun.

The MNAAP fully supports laws that require safe storage of firearms. Unlocked guns in homes increase the incidence of accidental injury and death as well as suicide. Last year, 249 children and adolescents younger than 18 years died as a result of unintentional firearm-related injuries. Children as young as 3, are strong enough to pull a trigger.

Counseling parents on ways to keep children safe is central to the mission of all physicians. Just as pediatricians need to ask questions about patient's safety, pediatricians have an absolute right to ask patients and their families about firearm storage in the home.

As we listen to the voices of anguish from those who have been traumatized or have lost children to senseless acts of firearm-related violence, let us also act. Our leaders in Congress need to offer more than thoughts and prayers. The time for action is now.

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