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Gun Violence, Car Accidents, and Fires: Leading Causes of Injury Deaths Among NYC Children

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The recent surge of attention paid to the tragic death of children due to mass shootings has spurred the nation into action to try to prevent these random acts of horrific gun violence. The timing of these important conversations coincides with the [release of the 2012 report](#) of the NYC Child Fatality Review Advisory Team (CFRAT), of which I am a member. We reviewed 10 years of data on injury deaths of children from 2001 through 2010. In this report, a special focus was directed to the cause of death among children 13 to 17 years old. Gun violence persists as a leading cause of death in this age group.

In NYC and nationally, firearms are the most common mechanism of youth homicide, accounting for 68 percent of youth homicides in NYC and 82 percent in the United States. Prevention efforts are critical to lower these grim statistics. Action must be taken now. The CFRAT recommends that policy makers support efforts to reduce access to illegal guns, such as improving background checks and closing purchasing loopholes to better prevent crime and violence caused by illegal guns.

Following death by homicide, the other leading types of injury death among 13-17 year olds are unintentional injury deaths such as transportation accidents, fires and drowning. Finally, suicide by hanging, jumping from a high place, firearms and overdoses took the lives of 93 youth during this review period.

I'd like to highlight the other key findings of the CFRAT report, as parents should be aware as to the types of injuries that are most likely to cause harm to younger children too. Among children ages 1 to 12 in NYC, injury is the leading cause of death. About 48 children a year die from injuries.

The leading type of injury in this age group is due to transportation deaths. Children were killed primarily while they were pedestrians, when walking or riding their bikes or scooters. They were also killed while passengers in cars. Diver inattention and children emerging from between parked vehicles

were the most common reasons why children were killed. Other reasons included: driver failure to yield and speeding. Pedestrian error was identified in about a quarter of the cases, such as, crossing against a signal and pedestrian inattention.

Fires are the second highest reason for injury deaths of children. Records indicate that all of the deaths occurred in private homes. The most common ignition sources were the use of matches or lighters by children. This is followed by overloading electrical outlets, extension cords and power strips. Candles, faulty appliances, open stoves and cigarette/cigars and space heaters were some of the other ignition sources. Alarming, in 51 percent of these cases, smoke detectors were either not present or present but non-operational.

Homicide and suicide accounted for approximately 25 percent of all injury deaths among one- to 12-year-olds. Children died due to blunt force trauma, firearm wounds or fatal child abuse syndrome, meaning that the child showed evidence of being battered over time. Thirteen children died by suicide.

Very sobering statistics. Very tragic deaths that could have been prevented. Some of the recommendations that the CFRAT offer to parents include:

- Supervise young children closely when they play and particularly when they are on the street.
- Teach your children to look both ways before crossing, obey pedestrian and traffic signals and to cross only at the cross walks. Practice these steps with them.
- Parents — drive safely; pay attention while driving, obey the speed limit; please don't ever text and drive or talk on a cell phone while driving.
- Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- Check your smoke alarms once a month and change batteries every spring and fall when you change your clocks for daylight savings time.
- Do not keep firearms in your home. If there must be any kind of weapon in your home, keep it locked away where children cannot reach it. Keep it unloaded and use a trigger lock.
- Teach your child non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and that the consequences of violence can be severe. Become familiar with anti-violence campaigns in your community and your child's school.
- Seek medical or mental health counseling for your child if he/she appears depressed or expresses thoughts of suicide. 1-800 LIFENET is available 24 hours a day for assistance.
- Get help when the stresses of parenting are overwhelming. For support call the 24 hour Prevention and Parent Helpline at 1-800-CHILDREN. (1-800-244-53730)

To view the 2012 NYC Child Fatality Review Advisory Team Report in its entirety, or, to learn about ways to protect your child, please visit www.nyspcc.org.