

Youth gun violence has increased ‘dramatically’

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USA TODAY NETWORK

DES MOINES, Iowa — Rumors on a bus the morning of March 4 tipped an assistant principal and counselor that a student at a Kansas high school might be armed. Soon, two school officials were looking for Jaylon Elmore.

He was in shop class, his backpack next to him. It was about 10:30 a.m. The varsity football player was taken to the school office, where officials asked to search his backpack, according to an affidavit.

Elmore refused, grabbing a homemade pistol from it and firing five shots, the records state. One round hit an assistant principal, and another struck a police officer assigned to the suburban school outside Kansas City. The officer returned fire, wounding Elmore, who is now charged with attempted capital murder.

The incident came three days before a drive-by shooting outside a high school in Des Moines, Iowa, that killed one teen and injured two others.

In Salem, a boy was shot and injured in March during a confrontation between two groups of teens at Salem Center Mall. The shooter ran away with his friends and police have not made any arrests.

In Pittsburgh, two 17-year-old boys were fatally shot and nine others wounded over Easter weekend during a mass shooting at a party of mostly teenagers at an Airbnb. Some 90-100 rounds were fired during the chaos.

The shooting came just as police there and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were planning a news conference to discuss how youth were getting hold of guns in the city.

The incidents are emblematic of a national trend: Across the U.S., more kids are getting their hands on guns and using them in an escalating number of murders, suicides and accidental shootings, experts and data say.

1,352 shootings involving kids so far this year. By May 8, there were at least 1,556 incidents where teenagers younger than 19 were injured or killed by gunfire this year, figures from the Gun Violence Archive show. That total in 2021 was 5,543 incidents.

The archive's data, which is publicly sourced, also shows that more than 1,500 people 18 years old or younger were killed by gun violence in 2021, up from 1,380 in 2020.

“Gun violence among youth is increasing dramatically — that’s just what the data shows,” said Mark Bryant, executive director of the nonprofit archive, which claims no affiliation with any advocacy organization. “I’m not able to see how we are going to come down off this. I don’t know that it will necessarily continue to trend up, but I’m not seeing anything that would say, ‘OK, well, it’s cool now.’”

The Gun Violence Archive shows 13 Mid-Valley shootings in 2021 involving teens in which someone was injured or killed. Four people died and nine were injured. Among those:

- Gerardo Trujillo-Torres, 17, has been charged with the murder of Joshua Steward, 24, on Jan. 16, 2021, in the parking lot by Hoover Elementary School in Salem. Steward’s 22-year-old girlfriend was also shot in the head. The girlfriend said they were meeting with Trujillo-Torres to buy cocaine.
- A 16-year-old was charged with shooting and killing Juan Tomas Santos Bautista, 16, on Jan. 26, 2021 at the French Prairie Rest Area in Aurora. Both teens were from Vancouver, Wash.
- A 17-year-old boy died following a March 24, 2021 shooting in the Four Corners area of southeast Salem. A second 17-year-old boy was injured and two others were detained.
- Ollie Taylor, 17, died following a shooting between his kidnapper Kenneth William Peden III, 20, and police on May 12, 2021. Peden also shot and injured Taylor’s 22-year-old friend during the kidnapping. Peden was indicted on murder charges, but died by suicide Sept. 22 in Marion County Jail.

In 2020, there were 10 Mid-Valley teen-related incidents in which four people died and six were injured, according to the Gun Violence Archive. In 2019, there were nine incidents involving two deaths and six injuries.

Caution is needed in analyzing the numbers, which have been cyclical over the decades, and in analyzing how the police and politicians respond, said James Alan Fox, a criminologist at Northeastern University.

Firearms-related homicide was the top cause of death for those ages 1-24 beginning in 2017 and continuing through 2020, when there were 10,186 gun-related deaths for the age group, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention records published April 16 in The New England Journal of Medicine. Gun homicides overtook motor vehicle accidents, which had been the leading cause for 60 years. Firearm-related deaths have been rising since 2013, and there was a 29.5% increase from 2019 to 2020.

In 2020, gun-involved homicides by kids under 18 were up to 1,704 incidents from 1,225 in 2019 — a 39% year-over-year increase of 479 shootings, according to FBI data compiled by Fox.

The same year, 2020, U.S. homicides involving all age groups were up 30%.

Fox said that big cities, and those with the highest gang activity, such as Chicago and Philadelphia, make up the bulk of teen cases.

The violence is not spread evenly across U.S. cities and towns, skewing the overall picture to suggest youth violence is up everywhere.

“What goes up generally comes back down,” Fox said. “You don’t want to minimize the severity of it when someone talks about thousands more people being killed. But let’s not also conclude that the trajectory will continue.”

Adding to the youth homicide toll are teen gun suicides. Suicide attempts by firearms are fatal 90% of the time, one study released in 2019 found. Comparatively, 8.5% of all suicidal acts reviewed by the study resulted in death.

Youth suicides and attempts, particularly among girls, have increased over the past decade. In 2020, suicide was the second-leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds, behind unintentional injury, according to the CDC.

Accidental shootings by those under 18 have also jumped. From the start of 2015 to the end of 2020, there were at least 2,070 unintentional teen shootings, causing 765 deaths, according to Everytown for Gun Safety.

Already this year, there have been at least 77 acci-



Ollie Taylor COURTESY OF THE TAYLOR FAMILY

dental shootings by youth, resulting in 31 deaths, according to data from the group.

Where do young people and teenagers get guns?

Experts and community members cite many reasons — poverty, instability and trauma as well as a lack of hope, education, opportunities and mental health resources — for the rise in gun violence among young people. But they also seek to figure out where the kids are getting guns.

Some minors grab legally owned firearms from their homes, stealing from a parent, guardian, relative or friend. Others commit home burglaries and car break-ins, including of police vehicles. Still others get guns through gang connections.

Federal and state laws generally bar people younger than 18 from purchasing guns.

But experts also say young people are increasingly using homemade firearms typically purchased over the internet, according to the ATF.

Elmore, 18, a senior at Olathe East High School in Kansas, allegedly used a camouflage-decorated 9 mm ghost gun. Exactly where he got it has not been disclosed.

Ghost guns, as they’re sold now, are typically assembled from kits and carry no serial numbers, making it nearly impossible for law enforcement to track their origins.

Agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, along with Salem Police Department detectives, in March recovered dozens of homemade firearms and firearm parts in various stages of completion during a raid of two Salem homes.

It was believed to be the largest case of ghost guns in the state, but Salem police detective said they’ve seen an “exponentially” increasing number of privately made firearms seized in police operations in recent months.

In mid-April, President Joe Biden moved to crack down on ghost guns with new restrictions on the sale and distribution of the guns and parts. The new rules include requirements on manufacturers and sellers of ghost guns to do background checks and stamp the weapons with serial numbers to make them traceable.

From the start of 2016 through the close of 2020, the ATF reported some 24,000 suspected ghost guns were recovered nationally by law enforcement from potential crime scenes. Roughly 325 homicides or attempted homicides were committed using the weapons.

“A person can make a gun for themselves ... and that’s perfectly legal,” said John E. Ham, ATF’s Kansas City-based spokesman, so long as purchasers are not convicted felons, convicted of domestic violence, addicted to narcotics or in the country illegally.

He stressed that “the caveat on the federal law is that a personally made firearm cannot enter commerce. So it can’t be sold. It can’t be traded. You can’t give it to your buddy.”

Ten states and some cities have moved to curtail ghost guns, which can also be made from 3-D printers. Washington is among them but Oregon is not.

Many teen shooters get guns at home

Ghost guns still make up a very small share of the overall gun marketplace, Bryant said. Most guns that wind up in the hands of young people come from the home, according to gun control advocates and the ATF.

“If you can’t find a gun in under two hours, you aren’t looking hard enough,” Bryant said, noting that many states have lowered restrictions to owning and carrying firearms.

“These kids get these guns from their houses. They break into houses. They break into cars,” Bryant said. In most cases, he said, “They don’t have to build a gun.”

Nicole Hockley, co-founder of Sandy Hook Promise, an anti-gun nonprofit founded after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, said 68% of gun-related incidents at schools have involved shooters who took guns from their own homes.

The percentage grows to about 76% when relatives’ homes are included.

Research from Carmel Salhi, a Northeastern University professor, shows that 70% of parents believe their children can’t get to the guns in their homes.

But in his research, Salhi found that some 30% or more of teens from 13 to 17 years old reported they could gain control of a loaded gun kept in their home in under five minutes. Half could gain access in less than an hour.

Law enforcement and gun-control advocates also note the 64% year-over-year surge in gun sales in 2020 — making 2020 a record year for firearms purchases.

The ATF’s Ham said to curb the surge in violence, the country needs to look beyond law enforcement.

“There are a lot of guns in circulation. It takes more than one federal agency or one law enforcement agency” to quell the violence, he said. “It takes community involvement, it takes responsible gun ownership, it takes parents taking steps to make sure that those guns can’t walk out of their house.”

Statesman Journal reporter Virginia Barreda contributed to this report.

Follow reporters Andrea Sahouri and Eric Ferkenhoff on Twitter: @andreamsahouri, @EricFerk.

Trust offers cash incentives for fire-resistant reconstruction

Adam Duvernay

Register-Guard
USA TODAY NETWORK

Oregonians rebuilding homes and businesses after the wildfires of recent years can take advantage of new cash incentives from Energy Trust of Oregon for using design features that are both energy efficient and wildfire resistant.

The nonprofit now is offering to help homeowners build using design features serving both purposes. People rebuilding their homes and businesses after wildfires are qualified for even larger cash incentives.

“Sadly, we’re seeing wildfire seasons lasting longer and becoming more severe,” Energy Trust of Oregon Executive Director Michael Colgrove said in a news release.

Energy Trust programs are offered in cooperation with Oregon’s Department of Energy and Oregon’s Building Code Division programs, with incentives covering single-family homes, manufactured homes and commercial buildings.

Energy Trust cash incentives are normally offered for energy-efficient features such as advanced framing and lighting, high-performance windows and efficient appliances, heating and cooling, according to the news release.

Energy Trust now also offers new cash incentives for design elements that both increase efficiency and strengthen homes against wildfires, including:

- Triple pane windows adding another layer between the interior of a home and the fire;
- Exterior rigid insulation that is highly flame resistant and can provide considerable energy savings;
- Unvented attics which can save energy and lower fire risk because they can help keep embers from entering a home

Public Notices

PUBLIC NOTICE CITY OF SILVERTON RESOLUTION NO. 09-27

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF SILVERTON DECLARING SUPPORT FOR, AND ADOPTING CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO, THE FAIR HOUSING AMENDMENTS ACT OF 1988

LET IT BE KNOWN TO ALL PERSONS of the City of Silverton that discrimination in the sale, rental, lease, advertising of sale, rental or lease, financing of housing or land to be used to construction of housing, or in the provision of brokerage, rental services because of race, color, sex, disability (physical or mental), familial status (children) or national origin is prohibited by Title VIII of the federal Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. It is the policy of the City of Silverton to support the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 and to implement a Fair Housing Program to ensure equal opportunity in housing for all persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, disability (physical and mental), familial status (children) or national origin. Therefore, the City of Silverton does hereby pass the following Resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that within the resources available to the City of Silverton through city, county, state, federal and community volunteer services, the City of Silverton will assist all persons who feel they have been discriminated against because of race, color, religion, sex, disability, (physical and mental), familial status (children) or national origin in the process of filing a complaint with the Oregon Civil Rights Division or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Seattle Regional Office Compliance Division, that they may seek equity under federal and state laws.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City of Silverton shall publicize this Resolution and through this publicity shall cause real estate brokers and sellers, private home sellers, rental owners, rental property managers, real estate and rental advertisers, lenders, builders, developers, home buyers and home or apartment renters to become aware of their respective responsibilities and rights under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 and any applicable state or local laws or ordinances.

THE FAIR HOUSING PROGRAM, for the purpose of informing those affected of their respective responsibilities and rights concerning Fair Housing law and complaint procedures, will at a minimum include, but not be limited to: 1) the printing, publicizing and distribution of this Resolution; 2) the distribution of posters, flyers, pamphlets and other applicable Fair Housing information provided by local, state and federal sources, through local media of community contracts; and 3) the publicizing of locations where assistance will be provided to those seeking to file a discrimination complaint.

Adopted by the City Council of the City of Silverton the 6th day of July, 2009.

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