Nearly one in five children and teens found to be at risk for suicide report that there are guns in their homes, and 15 percent of those at risk for suicide with guns in the home know how to access both the guns and the bullets, according to a study to be presented Monday, May 6, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Washington, DC.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10 to 24 years in the United States, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data. Nearly half of youths who die by suicide use a firearm.

Researchers conducted a study to create a suicide risk screening tool that health care professionals in emergency departments (EDs) could use to figure out which youths need further mental health evaluation to keep them from harming themselves. As part of that study, researchers asked youths about access to guns in or around their home and about gun/bullet storage.

"For more than 1.5 million adolescents, the ED is their primary point of contact with the health care system, which makes the ED an important place for identifying youth at risk for suicide," said Stephen J. Teach, MD, MPH, FAAP, associate chief in the Division of Emergency Medicine at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC, and co-author who will be presenting the study at the PAS meeting.

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