Understanding Youth Violence

Fact Sheet

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.

How does youth violence affect health?
Deaths resulting from youth violence are only part of the problem. Many young people seek 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.

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 10 and 24.

• 5,764 young people age 10 to 24 were murdered—an average of 16 each day—in 2007.

• Over 656,000 physical assault injuries in young people age 10 to 24 were treated in U.S. emergency rooms in 2008.

• In a 2009 nationwide survey, about 32% of high school students reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey.

• Nearly 6% of high school students in 2009 reported taking a gun, knife, or club to school in the 30 days before the survey.

• An estimated 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in 2009.

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