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We have 90 days to make Minnesota safer for kids

Three steps the 2024 Legislature can take regarding guns.

By Marc Gorelick | FEBRUARY 18, 2024 — 6:00PM

We are not protecting our children. Yes, we buckle them into car seats. We strap seat belts across them and require them to wear bike helmets. We teach them to safely cross the street, take them to the doctor for checkups and get them vaccinated against disease.

We do all that, and then we send them into a society where they could get shot anywhere, at any time. A July 4th parade. Their own classroom. A trampoline at a birthday party. A Super Bowl celebration.

As pediatricians, we work day in and day out to prevent illness in our community's children and keep them healthy. Yet, guns are the No. 1 killer of kids in our country, and it is absolutely preventable. When it comes to the largest threat to children's health, we allow partisanship to defeat safety. The cost is our kids' lives.

We are not protecting our children.

We as Minnesotans have 90 days to make our state safer for our kids. That's about how long this year's legislative session, now underway, will last. It's the amount of time we have to demand lawmakers pass effective gun safety measures.

We need lawmakers to:

1. Require safe gun storage. We know that unsecured guns pose clear risks, especially to children. Safe storage has been shown to significantly decrease firearm injuries among kids.
2. Require gun owners to more immediately report lost or stolen firearms. Stolen guns pose a risk to our communities as they enter the illegal gun market and fuel more violence.
3. Allow Medicaid to pay for hospital-based violence intervention programs like Next Step that interrupt the cycle of violence and help victims of gun violence heal.

Thankfully, the 11 children shot in Kansas City on Wednesday will likely survive. But they are also likely to bear the physical and emotional trauma of sudden, inexplicable violence for the rest of their lives.

This is not normal. Unlike kids today, most parents didn't grow up with the fear of being gunned down in a public place, having to perform active shooter drills at school. We cannot allow this to be our normal any longer.

Our children cannot protect themselves. That is our job. Our most important job. In the next 90 days, in partnership with our Minnesota legislators, let's do that job to the very best of our ability.

Dr. Marc Gorelick is president and CEO of Children's Minnesota.