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Presentation title: Gun Violence in Mexico and Central America: The Source of the Problem

The six countries accounting for over half of the world's firearm deaths are all located in the Americas. In Mexico, there is only one retail store that sells firearms; the majority, 70% of firearms confiscated and traced from Mexico originated in the United States (US). Medical and public health activists have advocated for increased understanding of and attention to the role of the US in driving gun violence in other countries. We aim to fill this gap in the discourse of global gun violence. We apply a public health lens to describe the flow of guns that are manufactured in the US and find their way, licitly and illicitly, to Mexico and Central America, ultimately benefitting the US firearms industry. Over 213,000 firearms are purchased in the US each year—or 584 per day—to be illegally trafficked to Mexico. Approximately 47% of federally licensed firearms dealers in the US would go out of businesses if the illicit US-Mexico firearm trade ceased to exist. Recent policy changes implemented by the past US administration greatly reduced regulatory hurdles for US businesses wishing to export firearms and increase the risk that these firearms can end up in the wrong hands. US arms producers dramatically increased firearm exports following the rule's implementation: Over 300,000 firearms were exported by the US between March and July 2020, almost three times the amount exported during the same period of 2019. Considering the scale of the regional firearm-fueled epidemic, we conclude that there is much more that the medical field and public health communities can and must do to stop the spread of this vector of lethal violence. We call for better policies and programs to regulate the production, transfer, and sale of this uniquely lethal American product.