A call to end gun violence

The letter from Dr. Gideon Rapaport of Levittown, N.Y., titled “Right to bear arms vs. tyranny,” (April, AAP News) cannot go unanswered. The data presented are incorrect and incomplete, and he presents a faulty analysis of the problem of gun violence in the United States.

In 1996, there were 34,040 firearm-related deaths of which 4,643 were to children less than 20 years of age: 2,836 (61 percent) were the result of homicide, 1,309 (28 percent) were suicide, 386 (8 percent) were unintentional and 112 (3 percent) undetermined. Nearly 86 percent of all homicides to 15- to 19-year-olds are firearm-related.

Firearm violence is a pediatric and adult public health problem of epidemic proportions. Most homicides occur on impulse during interpersonal conflict. For both rural and urban areas, handguns in particular account for the greatest proportion of firearm-related injuries. A gun in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a family member or friend than to kill in self-defense. A gun in the home increases the risk of domestic homicide threefold, and increases the risk of suicide five times. Adolescents are particularly at risk. The United States has the highest rates of firearm-related deaths (including homicide, suicide and unintentional deaths) among industrialized countries. The overall firearm-related deaths for U.S. children under age 15 years is almost 12 times greater than that found for 25 other industrialized countries. This difference seems to be related to a lack of measures to the ease of availability of guns in the United States compared with other industrialized countries. In addition, for every death there are 50 people nonfatally injured. More than 130,000 people per year are injured or die as a result of firearms.

Dr. Rapaport argues the Second Amendment, as he understands it, is what keeps our society from falling prey to tyranny. I believe this argument to be fundamentally flawed. Federal rulings have indicated the “right” to bear arms is linked to the preservation of state militias and is not meant to provide an individual with the right to own a firearm. The government remains free to ban whole classes of guns. History has taught us that both armed and unarmed conflicts have led to the liberalization of peoples. In this century, the heroism of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi attest to the power of nonviolence. Surely the tens in Littleton, Colo., who shouted their voice hatred of “minorities” as they stormed into Columbine High School on the day of Hitler’s birthday, did not speak to the ideas of liberation from oppression.

Arming our civilian population surely cannot be the response to our societal problems. We must resolve as a nation to address the issues of violence and hatred upfront and to make it a national priority to decrease the lethality of conflicts by eliminating guns from our communities. Let us embrace the right to live.

Danielle Laraque, M.D., FAAP
New York

Too many vaccines

An article in the April issue of AAP News addresses the consideration of routine immunization with Hepatitis A.

Question: Is the United States becoming too irrational with its infant and child immunization schedule? Too much! Too many painful shots and too much expense for everyone. Are we to increase new vaccines by two every year until we protect against the most common 50 diseases? Enough already. Someone must evidence sanity and some degree of compassion and fiscal integrity.

Gary Gorlick, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP
Los Angeles