

## ATF on right track in fighting proliferation of “ghost guns”

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**What's the news:** The AMA is supporting a regulatory move to ensure that federal firearms control laws apply to so-called ghost guns.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has proposed updating the definitions of “firearm” and related parts for the first time since 1968 to modernize the definition of “frame or receiver.” That would help close a regulatory loophole associated with the unserialized, privately made firearms that are increasingly being recovered at crime scenes across the country.

“These unmarked firearms, known as ‘ghost guns,’ are often assembled from kits that are sold without background checks, making them easily acquired by criminals who otherwise would not be permitted to possess a firearm,” AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, wrote in a letter to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, who oversees the ATF, a Department of Justice Agency. “The AMA supports this important proposed rule and urges that it be finalized without delay.”

**Why it's important:** “Ghost guns are firearms that anyone can buy in parts and kits and assemble at home, and because they are unserialized, they are nearly impossible for law enforcement to trace,” Dr. Madara noted. “They are a growing murder weapon of choice in America, and are increasingly being used in robberies, mass shootings and homicides across the country.”

Between 2016 and 2020, over 23,000 unserialized firearms were recovered by law enforcement from potential crime scenes, according to the ATF. These were in connection with 325 homicides or attempted homicides.

Dr. Madara outlined three ways the new rule would help. The regulatory changes would:

- Make clear that retailers must run background checks before selling kits that contain the parts necessary for someone to readily make a gun at home.
- Require that manufacturers include a serial number on the firearm “frame or receiver” in easy-to-build firearm kits.

Set out requirements for federally licensed firearms dealers to have a serial number added to 3D-printed guns or other unserialized firearms they take into inventory.

**Learn more:** About 40,000 Americans die each year from firearm-related injuries. The AMA has declared gun violence to be a public health crisis and over the past two decades has developed numerous additional policy recommendations to reduce firearm trauma, injury and death. These include:

- A waiting period for firearm availability.
- Background checks for all firearm purchasers.
- Firearm safety and research, and enhancing access to mental health care.
- Gun-safety education and regulation of interstate traffic of guns.
- Distribution of firearm-safety materials in the clinical setting.
- Limiting and controlling the possession and storage of weapons on school property.
- Firearm-safety counseling with patients.
- Trigger locks and gun cabinets to improve firearm safety.
- Data on firearm deaths and injuries.
- Preventing unintentional shooting deaths among children.
- Waiting period before gun purchase.
- Restricting assault weapons.
- Mandated penalties for crimes committed with firearms.
- A public health policy approach for preventing violence in America.

The AMA has developed resources to help physicians address firearm injuries, including a CME module designed to help doctors recognize risk factors and effectively communicate with patients to reduce the risk of firearm injury and death.

Read about three cases where talking about firearms in the exam room matters.