**BBC Newsbeats Guide to Gun Laws**

President Barack Obama has unveiled his gun control plans. He has said that the US must do more to protect American children, after the shooting at a school in Newtown, Connecticut.

Twenty children and six women died in the assault on Sandy Hook school last month by a lone man who then took his own life.

The gunman has been identified by police as Adam Lanza, 20, who shot dead his mother before driving to the school in her car.

Officials say he was armed with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, and used a semi-automatic rifle as his main weapon. He was also carrying two handguns, and a shotgun was recovered from a car.

New rules described as the toughest in the US were introduced in New York state on Tuesday.

Any law-abiding citizen in the United States is allowed to own or carry a gun.

That right comes from the US Bill of Rights and the second amendment to the United States Constitution, the country's supreme law, which was written in 1791.

It reads: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Anyone over the age of 18 is allowed to buy a rifle or shotgun from a licensed dealer in any state with over-21s able to buy handguns too.

Certain people are banned from owning weapons including convicted criminals, people with mental health illnesses or non-US citizens.

There are also special rules banning guns in and near schools.

There has been a lot of debate about the right to own and carry guns in America, mostly after mass shootings.

Last year, James Eagan Holmes, 24, opened fire at a screening of Dark Knight Rises in Aurora, Colorado, killing 12 people and injuring 58.

Holmes was armed with a number of guns - all of which he bought legally.

Oscar-winning documentary-maker Michael Moore made a film about the issue following the Columbine school shootings in 1999.

Two students shot 13 people dead and wounded 23 others before killing themselves.

There was more debate after the 2007 Virginia Tech shootings in which 32 people died.

In its most simple terms, those opposed to gun use and ownership say fewer people would die if there were tighter controls.

They point to the high number of people killed in the United States every year compared to countries where people aren't allowed to own guns.

Those in favour argue that American citizens should be allowed to defend themselves, especially in more rural and less populated areas of the country and that it is their right under the second amendment.

They also say that if guns were banned only criminals would be armed.

Politics

The issue of gun control and ownership was not a priority for either of the two main candidates for president - Mitt Romney and Barack Obama at last year's US election.

Groups such as the wealthy National Rifle Association (NRA) and the Gun Owners of America (GOA) often mobilise voters and politicians to back existing gun laws and argue against anti-gun lobbies.

Politicians fear arguing against those organisations could lose them votes.

The Brady Campaign is the largest US group campaigning for the restriction of guns.

**NY Times *What’s in Obama’s Gun Control Proposal***

The initiative to reduce gun violence announced by President Obama on Wednesday includes both legislative proposals that would need to be acted on by Congress and executive actions he can do on his own. Many of the executive actions involve the president directing agencies to do a better job of sharing information.

Proposed Congressional Actions

Requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales, including those by private sellers that currently are exempt.

Reinstating and strengthening the ban on assault weapons that was in place from 1994 to 2004.

Limiting ammunition magazines to 10 rounds.

Banning the possession of armor-piercing bullets by anyone other than members of the military and law enforcement.

Increasing criminal penalties for "straw purchasers," people who pass the required background check to buy a gun on behalf of someone else.

Acting on a $4 billion administration proposal to help keep 15,000 police officers on the street.

Confirming President Obama's nominee for director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Eliminating a restriction that requires the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to allow the importation of weapons that are more than 50 years old.

Financing programs to train more police officers, first responders and school officials on how to respond to active armed attacks.

Provide additional $20 million to help expand the a system that tracks violent deaths across the nation from 18 states to 50 states.

Providing $30 million in grants to states to help schools develop emergency response plans.

Providing financing to expand mental health programs for young people.

Executive actions

Issuing a presidential memorandum to require federal agencies to make relevant data available to the federal background check system.

Addressing unnecessary legal barriers, particularly relating to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, that may prevent states from making information available to the background check system.

Improving incentives for states to share information with the background check system.

Directing the attorney general to review categories of individuals prohibited from having a gun to make sure dangerous people are not slipping through the cracks.

Proposing a rule making to give law enforcement authorities the ability to run a full background check on an individual before returning a seized gun.

Publishing a letter from the A.T.F. to federally licensed gun dealers providing guidance on how to run background checks for private sellers.

Starting a national safe and responsible gun ownership campaign.

Reviewing safety standards for gun locks and gun safes (Consumer Product Safety Commission).

Issuing a presidential memorandum to require federal law enforcement to trace guns recovered in criminal investigations.

Releasing a report analyzing information on lost and stolen guns and making it widely available to law enforcement authorities.

Nominating an A.T.F. director.

Providing law enforcement authorities, first responders and school officials with proper training for armed attacks situations.

Maximizing enforcement efforts to prevent gun violence and prosecute gun crime.

Issuing a presidential memorandum directing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to research gun violence.

Directing the attorney general to issue a report on the availability and most effective use of new gun safety technologies and challenging the private sector to develop innovative technologies.

Clarify that the Affordable Care Act does not prohibit doctors asking their patients about guns in their homes.

Releasing a letter to health care providers clarifying that no federal law prohibits them from reporting threats of violence to law enforcement authorities.

Providing incentives for schools to hire school resource officers.

Developing model emergency response plans for schools, houses of worship and institutions of higher education.

Releasing a letter to state health officials clarifying the scope of mental health services that Medicaid plans must cover.

Finalizing regulations clarifying essential health benefits and parity requirements within insurance exchanges.

Committing to finalizing mental health parity regulations.

Starting a national dialogue on mental health led by Kathleen Sebelius, the secretary of health and human services, and Arne Duncan, the secretary of education.