

Promote secure firearm storage

Firearms are the most common and most lethal method of suicide. **Secure storage of firearms can prohibit access to lethal means intended for suicide**, reducing risk for the firearm owner and all members of the household. To reduce deaths by suicide, AFSP urges states to bolster secure storage options.

The Facts



Firearms account for **over half** of suicide deaths¹



85-90% of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal^{2,3}



Suicide risk is exacerbated by **ready access** to firearms or other lethal means^{4,5}

AFSP Recommendations

- **Incentivize use of firearm secure storage devices through tax exemptions or grant programs**
- **Increase options for temporary transfers or community storage of firearms**
- **Establish a process for firearm hold agreements by clarifying liability protections for ranges and retailers**

Background

- Although access to firearms does not cause suicidal behavior, access to firearms increases the likelihood of suicide among at-risk individuals^{6,7}
- Putting time and distance between a person at risk and lethal means can save lives; this allows time for the suicidal risk to subside and for someone to intervene with mental health support and resources⁸
- Most individuals who are prevented from making a suicide attempt via one method typically do not go on to attempt with another method; if they do substitute with another method, it will likely be less lethal⁹
- Law enforcement agencies and firearm retailers express interest in offering secure firearm storage outside the home during a crisis, yet cite concerns about liability as a barrier^{10, 11}
- Nearly two-thirds of individuals with firearms in the home report that they would likely consider outside storage options during a mental health crisis in the home¹²
- Storing loaded firearms in the home is strongly associated with suicide death among active-duty soldiers¹³
- The majority of minors who die by suicide with a firearm use one kept in their home; nearly 90% of firearms used in these cases are stored unlocked^{14, 15, 16}
- Less than a third of firearm-owning households with minors store firearms both unloaded and locked; ¹⁷ in households with minors at high risk for suicide, firearms tend to be stored securely at similar or lower rates^{18, 19}

Time and distance from lethal means during crises can save lives.



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Mortality 2018-2022 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released in 2024. Data are from the Multiple Cause of Death Files, 2018-2022, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10-expanded.html>.

² American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2023). Understanding firearms and suicide prevention. <https://afsp.org/an-introduction-to-firearms-and-suicide-prevention>.

³ Conner, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2019). Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 171(12), 885-895.

⁴ Miller, M.J., Barber, C.W., White, R.A., & Azrael, D. (2013). Firearms and Suicide in the United States: Is Risk Independent of Underlying Suicidal Behavior? *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 178(6), 946-55.

⁵ Houtsma, C., Butterworth, S. E., & Anestis, M. D. (2018). Firearm suicide: Pathways to risk and methods of prevention. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 22, 7-11.

⁶ Anestis, M.D. & Capron, D.W. (2018). Deadly Experience: The Association Between Firing a Gun and Various Aspects of Suicide Risk. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 48(6), 625-811.

⁷ Betz, M.E., Barber, C., & Miller, M. (2011). Suicidal behavior and firearm access: results from the second injury control and risk survey. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 41(4), 384-91.

⁸ Barber, C.W., & Miller, M.J. (2014). Reducing a Suicidal Person's Access to Lethal Means of Suicide: A Research Agenda. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 47(3), S264-S272.

⁹ Daigle, M.S. (2005). Suicide prevention through means restriction: Assessing the risk of substitution: A critical review and synthesis. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 27(4), 625-632.