

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PREVENTING FIREARM-RELATED DEATH AND INJURY

## What Should I Know About Death and Injury From Firearms?

People own firearms (guns) for many reasons, including protection, hunting, and other sporting use. Injury or death from guns is a large public health problem. Gun violence ranks among the 10 leading causes of death for Americans and is increasing. Although murders, including mass shootings, are commonly reported in the news, most firearm-related deaths are suicides.

## Who Is Most at Risk?

People who live in a home where there is a firearm are at greater risk for unintended death, suicide, or murder. An immediate risk is present if you or someone you know has a gun and expresses an interest in harming themselves or others. Other persons with risk factors for experiencing or causing a gun injury or death include those who:

- Misuse alcohol or other substances
- Have a history of violent behavior
- Have dementia or another form of poor mental function
- Have serious and poorly controlled mental illness
- Have an abusive partner

People who belong to certain demographic groups are also at high risk:

- Young black and Hispanic men are at higher risk for homicide by gun.
- Middle-aged or older non-Hispanic white men are at higher risk for suicide by gun.
- Children who visit or reside in a home with a gun are at higher risk for injury or death by gun.

## What Should I Do to Protect My Family From Injury if I Own a Gun?

Guns should be stored unloaded and locked up. Ammunition (bullets) should be stored separately. Storage options include locking devices, lock boxes, and firearm safes. Keep keys out of reach of those who should not have access. Your health care provider or local law enforcement may be able to guide you about where to obtain these devices.



## What Can I Do About Guns in the Homes of Family or Friends?

If you are concerned about guns in the home of a family member or friend, your health care provider can help you approach this issue. If you or someone you know is at immediate risk for harm, your provider may be able to help find a way to reduce this risk and to keep you and others safe, including arranging for someone else to temporarily hold the gun.

## Is It Legal for My Health Care Provider to Ask Me About Guns?

Your health care provider may ask about guns and their safe storage just as he or she might ask about other issues related to your safety and health (such as the safe storage of chemicals when there are small children in the home). Such conversations are legal, and no state laws prohibit you and your health care provider from talking about gun safety and reducing risks. However, just like any other health issue, you are not required to engage in a discussion if you don't want to.

## Questions for My Doctor

- Should I be concerned about firearm safety?
- What should I do to protect my family from injury if I own a gun?
- Why is proper gun storage so important?
- How can I safely store my firearms?
- How can I get help if I am feeling suicidal or violent?
- How can I help a friend or family member who has access to guns and is suicidal or violent?

## For More Information



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### American Psychological Association

[www.apa.org/topics/violence/gun-violence-prevention](http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/gun-violence-prevention)

### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/gunsafety.html>