Claiming the lives of nearly 22,000 Americans every year, including over 950 children and teens, firearm suicide is a significant public health crisis in the U.S. Nearly two-thirds of all gun deaths in the U.S. are suicides: an average of 59 deaths a day. And the problem is getting worse: over the past decade, the U.S. firearm suicide rate has increased by 19 percent. This trend has been of particular concern for children and teens, with the rate of firearm suicide up by 61 percent in the past ten years. Addressing firearm suicide is an essential element of any strategy to reduce both suicide and gun violence in this country. Given the unique lethality of firearms as a means of suicide, policies and practices that limit or disrupt access to firearms have been shown to save lives.

While firearms are used in less than 6 percent of suicide attempts, over half of suicide deaths are with firearms.

- Of the most commonly used methods of self-harm, firearms are by far the most lethal, with a fatality rate of approximately 85 percent. Conversely, less than 5 percent of people who attempt suicide using other methods will die, and the vast majority of all those who survive do not go on to die by suicide. This suggests that a reduction in suicide attempts by firearm would result in an overall decline in the suicide rate.

- While there may be warning signs leading up to suicide attempts, almost half of all survivors report less than 10 minutes of deliberation between the thought of suicide and the actual attempt. Therefore, the method used in this moment of crisis can mean the difference between life and death, and firearms are an especially lethal means of self-harm.

Access to firearms — meaning personal or household gun ownership — is strongly associated with an increased risk of suicide.

- People who live in U.S. states with high rates of household gun ownership are almost four times more likely to die by gun suicide than in states where fewer households own guns. This relationship remains strong even when controlling for other factors associated with suicide, like poverty, unemployment, serious mental illness, and substance abuse.

- A meta-analysis of 14 different scientific studies concluded that having access to a firearm triples one’s risk of death by suicide. This elevated risk applies not only to the gun owner, but everyone in the household.
A demographic analysis of firearm suicide victims reveals several key patterns.

- **Men represent 86 percent of firearm suicide victims, and are over six times more likely than women to die by firearm suicide.**\(^{18}\)

- For men, firearm suicide rates largely increase with age, and are especially high for male senior citizens (65 and older).\(^{19}\) For women, firearm suicide rates are highest in the 45 to 60 age range.\(^{20}\)

White Americans represent 87 percent of all firearm suicide victims, and have the highest rate of firearm suicide by race.\(^{21}\) American Indians and Alaska Natives also have a disproportionately high rate of firearm suicide.\(^{22}\)

- **Americans living in rural areas experience higher rates of firearm suicide than those living in urban areas.**\(^{23}\) The average firearm suicide rate increases as counties become more rural,\(^{24,25}\) and the rate of firearm suicide in the most rural counties is over two times higher than in the most urban.\(^{26}\)

**The U.S. firearm suicide rate is eight times that of other high-income countries.**\(^{27}\) Americans should be educated on the prevalence of firearm suicide, how having access to a gun increases the risk of suicide, and steps they can take to mitigate risk.

**Policies and practices that focus on disrupting access to firearms can reduce firearm suicides.** These include:

**Building public awareness about the suicide risk posed by firearm access.**

- **Most gun-owning Americans think their firearms make them safer.**\(^{28}\) The reality is that access to a firearm increases the risk of suicide for all people in the household.\(^{29}\)

- In the absence of public health campaigns led by the federal government, trusted experts like law enforcement, gun dealers, and medical professionals have all launched campaigns that help inform Americans about the risks of firearms in the home and how to mitigate those risks.

- Several law enforcement agencies run campaigns that provide new or prospective gun owners (or permit holders) with information about the risks of firearm access — particularly as it pertains to suicide.\(^{30}\)

- Physicians and other medical professionals are also crucial sources of information about the risk of firearm access. By asking their patients about firearm access and counseling about firearm suicide risk, medical professionals may help prevent these deaths. Counseling on Access to Lethal Means, or CALM, is one example of a program that trains medical professionals on how to explain the differing lethality of various suicide methods, and to “help clients at risk for suicide and their families reduce access to lethal means, particularly firearms.”\(^{31}\)

**Limiting the easy and immediate acquisition of firearms.**

- Policies and practices that disrupt the easy and immediate acquisition of firearms have been shown to save lives.

- States with permit-to-purchase (PTP) laws, which require an individual to obtain a permit in addition to a background check when buying a handgun, see reductions in firearm suicide.\(^{32,33}\) Connecticut’s enactment of PTP and comprehensive point-of-sale background check laws were associated with a 15 percent decline in the firearm suicide rate over the following decade.\(^{34}\) By contrast, when Missouri repealed its PTP law, this repeal was associated with a 16 percent increase in the firearm suicide rate over the following five years.\(^{35}\)

- A mandatory waiting period may also help prevent firearm suicides by inserting a buffer between impulse and action. A waiting period law requires a certain number of days to elapse between the purchase of a firearm and when the purchaser can actually take possession of that firearm. Policies that create this buffer are associated with reduced rates of firearm suicide.\(^{36,37}\)
Encouraging the responsible storage of firearms in the home to prevent access by children and other unauthorized users.

- Responsible firearm storage can help mitigate the risks of firearm suicide, especially for children.\textsuperscript{38}
- 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.\textsuperscript{39} When American children die by firearm suicide, over 80 percent use a gun belonging to a family member.\textsuperscript{40}
- Storing household guns locked, unloaded, or separate from the ammunition is associated with reductions in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens — up to 85 percent depending on the type of storage practice.\textsuperscript{41}
- Many cities and states have laws that require or encourage responsible storage. Four states and the District of Columbia have passed laws mandating that owners responsibly store their firearms. And 14 states have passed Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws, which impose criminal penalties on adults when a child gains unsupervised access to their firearms. States with safe storage or CAP laws have seen reductions in firearm suicide rates for children.\textsuperscript{42,43,44}

Creating mechanisms to temporarily remove firearms from individuals in moments of crisis.

- To protect individuals in crisis, several states have passed extreme laws as a way to temporarily remove firearm access. These laws — which establish emergency risk protection orders (ERPOs), or gun violence restraining orders (GVROs) — allow immediate family members and/or law enforcement officers to petition a court to temporarily block gun possession by individuals who have exhibited behavior suggesting they are a risk to themselves or others. At the time of publication, 13 states have Red Flag Laws in place.
- In the ten years after Indiana passed its Red Flag Law, the state’s firearm suicide rate decreased by 7.5 percent.\textsuperscript{45} In Connecticut, the Red Flag Law was associated with a 14 percent reduction in firearm suicide rate once enforcement of the law increased significantly in 2007.\textsuperscript{46}
- Another study in Connecticut found that approximately one suicide was averted for approximately every 11 gun removals carried out under the law.\textsuperscript{47}

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7. 1-800-273-TALK (8255) suicidepreventionlifeline.org

You may also contact the Crisis Text Line, which provides trained crisis counseling services over text 24/7. Text HOME to 741741 for free from anywhere in the U.S. crisistextline.org
1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016. Children and teens defined as 0 to 19.

2. Ibid. A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.

3. Ibid. Firearm suicide to total suicide ratio and daily average developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.

4. Ibid. A percent change was developed using 2007-2016 age-adjusted rates for all ages.

5. Ibid. A percent change was developed using 2007-2016 crude rates for children and teens (0 to 19).


18. New York City firearm permit application “warning”. Email correspondence with New York Police Department.


20. Federal law requires criminal background checks for all guns purchased from a licensed firearms dealer, and does not cover any sales by unlicensed sellers. A total of twenty states (and Washington D.C.) have closed that critical gap for handguns, passing laws that require some form of a background check before a handgun purchase. Seven of those states require the check only for purchase of handguns for use by someone under the age of 18, and four require background checks both in order to obtain a permit and also at the point of sale.


22. Ibid.


24. Ibid.


27. Johnson RM, Barber C, Azrael D, Clark DE, Hemenway D. Who are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicides? Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. 2015; 52(2): 168-175.


36. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Tool (WONDER). A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.

37. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Tool (WONDER). A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.


39. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Tool (WONDER). A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.

40. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics, Wide-ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research Tool (WONDER). A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2012-2016.