Three-year-old Brayden Heath found his mother’s handgun in the living room of their home in Anchorage, Alaska. Brayden was playing with the gun when it discharged, shooting him in the head. He was taken to a local hospital and pronounced dead later that day.¹

INTRODUCTION
There are an estimated 265 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States,² and more than one-third of homes contain at least one gun.³ Responsible gun owners can make our homes and communities safer by storing their firearms unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept in a separate place, to prevent access by children and other people who are at risk of harming themselves or others. Research shows that these storage practices can play a vital role in reducing the risk of gun violence, particularly among children, due to unintentional shootings and gun suicides.⁴

The bottom line is this: Storing firearms unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition prevents access and saves lives.

WHAT IS SECURE FIREARM STORAGE?
Experts agree: In order to prevent access, firearm storage practices should include three methods employed in combination—unloading the ammunition, locking the firearm, and storing the firearm and ammunition in separate locations.⁵

Unload: Gun owners should remove all ammunition from the firearm, including removing any chambered rounds.

Lock: Unloaded firearms should be secured with a firearm locking device, such as a jacket lock, or in a locked location, like a safe or lock box. Locking devices, safes, and lock boxes are equipped with keys, combinations, or biometric technology that limit access. Remember: Firearm locks do not prevent gun theft.

Separate: Ammunition should be stored separately from the firearm in a secure location.
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concludes that the absence of guns from homes is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent suicide, homicide, and unintentional firearm-related injuries to children and adolescents. But if there are guns in the home, AAP notes that storing guns unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept in a separate place, can mitigate the risk of child firearm injury.

**KEY FINDINGS**

**Access to unsecured firearms contributes to gun violence among children and teens.** Brayden’s tragic story is all too common. Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. That’s roughly one unintentional shooting per day, and nearly 77 percent of these incidents take place inside a home. Another 590 children die by gun suicide each year, most often using guns belonging to a family member. Unsecured firearms also fuel gun violence outside the home. In incidents of gun violence on school grounds, 78 percent of shooters under the age of 18 obtained their guns from their own home, a relative’s home, or from friends.

We are all safer when guns are stored unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. One study found that households that locked both firearms and ammunition were associated with a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries, and an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children, compared to those that locked neither. Another study estimated that if half of households with children that contain at least one unlocked gun switched to locking all their guns, one-third of youth gun suicides and unintentional deaths could be prevented, saving an estimated 251 lives in a single year.

Despite the risks to safety, the majority of gun owners do not secure their firearms. While millions of responsible gun owners follow recommended storage practices, an estimated 54 percent do not lock all of their guns, let alone store them unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. Gun owners with children in the home are slightly more likely to lock all of their guns, but an estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm.

Contrary to popular belief, storage devices do not prevent owners from readily accessing their guns. There is a common myth that storage devices negate the self-defense purpose of owning a gun by putting time-consuming barriers between the gun owner and their means of defense. The reality is that there are many affordable options for firearm storage that provide owners with access to guns in a matter of seconds while still preventing access by children and people at increased risk of harming themselves or others. Further, it is possible that unsecured guns may actually increase the likelihood of crime and violence through an increased risk of gun theft. Each year, an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 guns are stolen, and many are funneled into the underground market, where once-legally-owned firearms can be transferred to people with dangerous histories.
American children are nearly twice as likely to be shot and killed as they are to die by drowning.\textsuperscript{22} Yet safety regulations for pools are far more pervasive and restrictive than those for guns.

The majority of states require that private pool owners use fences or locked gates to prevent drownings or other accidents.\textsuperscript{23} Only six states (and DC) have laws mandating that gun owners store their firearms securely.\textsuperscript{24}

**Regulations for Pool Owners in Arizona**

In Arizona, for example, pool owners must adhere to safety regulations regarding barriers and gates to prevent access. There are no safety regulations for gun owners in Arizona.

- **Gate:** Self-closing & self-latching.
- **Enclosure:** At least 5 feet tall.
- **Distance between pool and wall:** At least 20 inches.

Source: A.R.S. § 36-1681

**Current Policy and Program Landscape**

Various laws and public awareness programs are in place throughout the country to promote secure storage and provide incentives for gun owners to follow recommended storage practices.

**Federal Policy:** There is no federal law requiring secure storage by gun owners. Federal law requires gun dealers to provide a secure gun storage or gun safety device with the sale of every handgun.\textsuperscript{25} However, the law does not require that gun owners actually use the device—or any other best practices—to secure their firearms.

**State-Level Policies:** State-level laws regarding firearm storage vary widely. The strongest state laws mandate that gun owners secure firearms when they are not in the owner’s possession. Other laws further encourage people to secure their firearms in order to keep them out of the hands of children or persons legally prohibited from having them.

Six states and the District of Columbia have laws mandating that owners secure their firearms.\textsuperscript{26} In addition, several cities, including New York City and San Francisco, have local firearm storage ordinances requiring gun owners to secure their firearms when they are not in their possession.\textsuperscript{27}

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**Leading Causes of Death for Children 1–17 in 2017**

- **Motor Vehicle:** 2,176
- **Firearm:** 1,801
- **Cancer:** 1,506
- **Suffocation:** 1,139
- **Drowning:** 799

Fourteen states have passed another form of firearm storage laws, known as child access prevention (CAP) laws. These laws vary by state but generally stipulate that if a minor accesses a firearm, the person who failed to adequately secure the firearm is liable. Four states have storage laws that are aimed at preventing access to firearms by persons legally prohibited from having guns.

States with CAP laws saw an 8 percent decrease in overall suicide rates, and an 11 percent decrease in firearm suicide rates, among adolescents aged 14 to 17.

Public Awareness and Community Actions: Across the country, lawmakers, community members, and local leaders are working together to promote public awareness campaigns—such as Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America’s Be SMART program—that encourage secure gun storage practices and highlight the public safety risks of unsecured guns and the role of guns in suicide.

The Utah Suicide Prevention Coalition and the Utah Shooting Sports Council recognized their shared interest in preventing firearm suicide in their state and joined together to raise awareness. To deliver their message directly to gun owners, they incorporated a public service announcement about guns and suicide into mandatory training sessions for concealed carry permits.

Additionally, in New Hampshire, a coalition of researchers, gun owners, and gun dealers worked together to increase awareness of firearm suicide at a unique intervention point: when the individual enters the gun shop. Known as the Gun Shop Project, this campaign provided educational materials, including posters, brochures, and cards, to all the gun shops in the state. The project has now been adopted in 11 states.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gun owners understand that with rights comes responsibility, and promoting secure firearm storage is integral to public safety. Lawmakers and community members should work together to encourage recommended firearm storage practices through a combination of requirements and incentives for gun owners.

Federal law should be expanded to include a firearm storage law. States—and where permissible, cities—should enact new firearm storage laws and strengthen existing ones. These laws are demonstrably effective at increasing secure firearm storage and decreasing gun deaths.

Community members and local leaders should encourage secure firearm storage through outreach to gun owners and general public awareness campaigns. Researchers, clinicians, and gun owners should work together to develop messaging and recommend storage options that are relevant to local values and context.

Evidence suggests that clinicians who counsel patients can effectively promote recommended storage practices, particularly if storage devices are given away for free.
5. Guns owned by children. They are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicides? Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. 2010;40(6):609-611. Study defined children as under the age of 18. Over 60 percent of children who died by gun suicide used a gun belonging to a family member.


8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports. A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2013 to 2017. Children defined as aged 0 to 17.

9. 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. 2010;40(6):609-611. Study defined children as under the age of 18. Over 70 percent of children who died by gun suicide used a gun belonging to a family member.


