



Secure Firearm Storage Saves Lives *THE FACTS*

Preventing access to firearms by unauthorized, unsupervised children and teens reduces tragedies of suicides, unintentional shootings, school shootings and homicides in our communities. Creating a culture of secure firearm storage is an evidence-based solution to proactively reducing firearm tragedies.

Safety Begins at Home

Members of our communities are our first line of defense against tragedies that occur due to unsecure firearm storage. We urge firearm owners to secure firearms and ammunition safely: firearms should be locked and unloaded, with ammunition stored separately. We urge all members of the public to share this message among family members and friends, and to ASK about the presence of unsecured firearms in homes where children and teens visit. More information about steps *all adults* can take can be found at besmartforkids.org and endfamilyfire.org.

Facts About the USA and Massachusetts

- Nationwide, firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and teens.¹ Every year, nearly 4,000 children and teens ages 0-19 are shot and killed, or 11 each day.² 15,000 more children and teens ages 0-19 are shot and wounded every year.² And every year, 3 million children under age 18 witness gun violence.³
- Massachusetts and some other states have enacted strict Safe Storage Laws, but nationwide studies show that not all gun owners are aware of the laws.
- Massachusetts is among the safest states in the nation, although there are still too many tragic reports of firearm-related deaths and injuries.
- According to everystat.org,⁴ on average MA has ~255 gun deaths and ~557 gun-related injuries each year. These incidents, while lower compared to most states, are still higher than in peer countries.
- Firearms sales surged in 2020 and 2021. In MA, a WBUR analysis of state data found that gun dealers in MA sold almost 276,000 firearms from 2020 through 2021, about a 57% increase compared to 2019.⁵

Facts About the Risks of Unsecure Firearm Storage

- While millions of responsible gun owners store their firearms securely, more than half of gun owners do not store all their guns securely.⁶
- 4.6 million children under age 18 in the US live in a household with at least one loaded, unlocked gun.⁷
- **School Safety**
 - Unsecured firearms are the most common cause of school gun violence incidents.⁸
 - 76% of school shooters under age 18 acquired their firearm from the home of a parent or a close relative.^{9,10} According to the US Secret Service, addressing student access to guns is a critical component of any school-based threat assessment intervention plan.¹¹
 - Encouraging secure storage practices in the school community would address the most common source of firearms used in school gun violence incidents.¹²
- **Suicides**
 - Over 80% of minors who die by gun suicide use a gun accessible to them from their own home or belonging to a family member.¹³
 - The 2022 CDC national youth survey showed that 20% of high school students surveyed had seriously considered attempting suicide within the last year.¹⁴ Another study showed that 41 percent of adolescents in gun-owning households reported having “easy access” to the guns in their home.¹⁵

- The suicide rate among young people is at a record high, with alarming increases every year since 2007.¹⁶
- Firearm suicide makes up nearly half of suicides among young people.¹⁷
- Studies also show that access to a gun triples the risk of suicide.¹⁸
- Reducing unsupervised, unauthorized access by youth to firearms can significantly reduce suicide risk.¹⁹
- **Unintentional Shootings**
 - An unintentional shooting is one that was not caused on purpose. It can be self-inflicted or caused by someone else. Such shootings are often erroneously called “accidents” by the media, implying nothing could have stopped them from happening. However, such tragedies are fully preventable.
 - Nationwide in 2023, there were at least 411 unintentional shootings by minors,²⁰ the highest on record, resulting in 157 deaths and 270 injuries. A few cases were reported in MA in recent years.

The Good News

One study showed that households that locked both firearms and ammunition had:

- a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries among children and teens, and
- an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries.²¹

References

¹ CDC, WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death, Injury Mechanism & All Other Leading Causes, 2020. Ages 1–19. Including ICD-10-U07.1 (COVID-19).

² <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-teens/>

³ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-teens/> AND Finkelhor D, Turner HA, Shattuck A, Hamby SL. Prevalence of childhood exposure to violence, crime, and abuse: results from the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2015;169(8):746-54. Everytown analysis derives this number by multiplying the share of children (aged 0 to 17) who are exposed to shootings per year (4%) by the total child population of the US in 2016 (~73.5M).

⁴ <https://everystat.org/>

⁵ <https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/08/03/gun-sales-increasing-massachusetts>

⁶ Cassandra K. Crifasi et al., “Storage Practices of US Gun Owners in 2016,” *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 4 (2018): 532–37, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304262>

⁷ Deborah Azrael, Joanna Cohen, Carmel Salhi, and Matthew Miller, “Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey”, *Journal of Urban Health* 95, no 3 (2018): 295-304.

⁸ Everytown for Gun Safety. How to Stop Shootings and Gun Violence in Schools: 2022. Page 17.

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/how-to-stop-shootings-and-gun-violence-in-schools/>

⁹ National Threat Assessment Center, “Protecting America’s Schools: A US Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence,” US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, 2019. <https://bit.ly/2U7vnwa>

¹⁰ Everytown, AFT and NEA. “How to Stop Shootings and Gun Violence in Schools: 2022. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/how-to-stop-shootings-and-gun-violence-in-schools/>

¹¹ National Threat Assessment Center. Enhancing school safety using a threat assessment model: an operational guide for preventing targeted school violence. United States Secret Service and U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://bit.ly/2NKlwgD>. July 2018.

¹² Everytown for Gun Safety. How to Stop Shootings and Gun Violence in Schools: 2022. Page 31.

¹³ Johnson RM, Barber C, Azrael D, Clark DE, Hemenway D. Who are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicide? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. 2010; 40(6): 609-611. Study defined children as under 18.

¹⁴ Sherry Everett Jones et al., “Mental Health, Suicidality, and Connectedness among High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, United States, January–June 2021,” *MMWR Supplement* 71, no. 3 (April 2022): 16–21.

¹⁵ Joseph A. Simonetti et al., “Psychiatric Comorbidity, Suicidality, and In-Home Firearm Access Among a Nationally Representative Sample of Adolescents,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 72, no. 2 (2015):152–59.

¹⁶ <https://www.mass.gov/doc/oca-report-on-youth-suicide-in-massachusetts/download>

¹⁷ <https://everytownresearch.org/issue/child-teen-safety>

¹⁸ <https://www.everytown.org/solutions/educate-gun-owners/>

¹⁹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-rise-of-firearm-suicide-among-young-americans/>

²⁰ #NotAnAccident Index (<https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>)

Data is current as of March. 27, 2024. Refers to ages under 18.

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/how-to-stop-shootings-and-gun-violence-in-schools/>

²¹ Grossman DC, Mueller BA, Riedy C, et al. Gun storage practices and risk of youth suicide and unintentional injuries. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*. February 2005; 293(6): 707-714. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/200330>



Secure Firearm Storage Saves Lives *MA SAFE STORAGE LAW and AAP GUIDANCE*

MA Safe Storage Law

The MA Safe Storage Law, MA General Law (MGL), Title XX, Ch. 140 § 131C¹ and § 131L² details the requirements for secure firearm storage in homes and vehicles, when the firearm is not carried by or under the direct control of the gun owner or other lawfully authorized user. Firearms must be stored locked; in homes, the law allows locked firearms to be loaded; in vehicles, firearms must be locked and unloaded (with some exceptions). For further information, see also Mass.gov: Gun Ownership in Massachusetts.³

There is a Child Access Prevention component to the Law, applicable for all children under age 18. It imposes criminal liability on persons who negligently store firearms, where minors who do not possess a valid firearm identification card may gain access to the firearm. Typically, these laws apply whenever the person “knows or reasonably should know” that a child *may* gain access to the firearm.

American Academy of Pediatrics

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)⁴ states that “the absence of guns from children’s homes and communities is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent firearm-related injuries in children and adolescents.” However, if a gun is present in the home, the AAP and other organizations recommend that the safest approach to keeping children and teens safe is to secure firearms locked and unloaded, with ammunition locked separately.

References

¹ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter140/Section131C>

² <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter140/Section131L>

³ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/gun-ownership-in-massachusetts>

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Firearm-related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population, *Pediatrics* (2012) 130 (5): e1416–e1423. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/130/5/e1416/32375/Firearm-Related-Injuries-Affecting-the-Pediatric?autologincheck=redirected>



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WHY AND HOW TO ASK OTHERS ABOUT GUNS IN THEIR HOMES AND VEHICLES

Why Ask?

Owning a gun is a personal decision, but responsible firearm storage is a public safety issue. Kids and unsecured firearms are a potentially lethal combination. When unsupervised, unauthorized children and teens gain access to unsecured firearms in homes and vehicles, these firearms may result in intentional or unintentional harm. Firearm tragedies are now the main cause of death in children and teens in the USA due to all causes.¹

Fortunately, many of these firearm deaths and injuries are preventable. As parents and caregivers, you want to do everything you can to prevent children and teens from getting in a dangerous situation when they visit others' homes or ride in others' cars. A simple conversation can help keep them out of harm's way.

It can feel awkward for a parent or caregiver to bring up the issue of how guns at others' homes are stored, but it shouldn't. Today, over 19 million parents are asking. And, the first day of summer, June 21 is designated 'National ASK Day.'² However, a significant number of adults do not ask, because they either are unaware of the risks, or they feel uncomfortable asking. *One conversation could save your child's life.*

If there are guns in the home or vehicles, the safest response is: "Yes, and our guns are unloaded and stored in a locked safe; ammunition is locked separately." MA safe storage law addresses firearm storage when guns are *not under the direct control* of the licensed gun owner: the law stipulates that guns stored in homes must be locked, but they can be loaded. Guns in vehicles must be locked and unloaded (with a few exceptions).³

Principles of Asking

Above all, asking must be non-confrontational and non-judgmental. Everyone has a right to legally own a gun. *How firearms are stored*, if any, is what is important to know. These principles apply:

- Make asking part of your normal safety conversation. Are there allergies to be aware of, pets in the home, pools on the property, car seats for rides, rules on TV and screen time, unsecured firearms? Is there alcohol access, adult oversight, etc.
- If you are a gun owner (hunter, collector, sport shooter, or have guns for protection), offer up information first about firearm storage at your own home.
- If the answer you receive raises doubts in your mind, suggest another venue for the children or teens to get together. Most responsible gun owners would fully understand the importance of the question and provide a reply.

How to Ask?

Ask in person or using phone, email or text, whatever you are most comfortable with.

Suggested Resources:

<https://www.preventchildinjury.org/toolkits/firearm-safety-ask-day>

<https://besmartforkids.org/secure-gun-storage/resources/#asking-about-secure-gun-storage>

References

¹ Everytown Research analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, WONDER Online Database, Provisional Mortality Statistics, Multiple Cause of Death, Injury Mechanism & All Other Leading Causes, (accessed September 1, 2024). Data from 2023. Ages: 1–19. Age 0 to 1 excluded because leading causes of death for newborns and infants are specific to the age group. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>

² <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/campaigns-toolkits/ask-day-is-june-21>

³ <https://bit.ly/MASSlawAAP>



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EXAMPLES: HOW TO ASK OTHERS ABOUT GUNS IN THEIR HOMES



Examples - How to Ask:

The following examples provide ideas for how to ASK. They are asked during a back and forth conversation. *Remember: it's not about the guns, it's whether they are secured.* And, hiding a firearm is not securing it.

1. Hi Julie. I'm so excited that the kids are getting together for a playdate this weekend. I just wanted to check on a few things beforehand. Do you have a pool at your home? ... No? How about pets, John is allergic to dogs and cats. ... A dog? Ok no problem, I'll make sure he takes his medication before coming. ... And do you have any guns in the house? May I ask how they're stored? John can be a pretty curious kid, so I just want to make sure he doesn't get into anything.

2. Hey, excited the kids are getting together over the weekend. I know that they've hung out quite a bit, but my daughter has never been over to your house so I want to confirm a couple of things: Will an adult be at the house the whole time? ... Do you monitor Internet safety? ... Do you need me to pick Katie up or can you give her a ride home? ... Also – I heard a story on the news that made me decide I should always ask this – if you have firearms in your home, are they locked so they are inaccessible to kids?

3. Hi Mom! We are so excited to come to your house for the holidays! The kids can hardly wait! I'll be bringing along an apple pie, like always. Is there anything else I can bring? ... Oh, yes...there is one thing that is on my mind lately. I've heard so many stories about tragic situations in homes in which kids find loaded, unsecured guns and end up shooting themselves. That is so terrible, and I've started asking when the kids go to others' homes. How about those hunting rifles at your and Dad's house? How are they stored?

4. Hi Barbara! Annie is excited about her playdate with Candice tomorrow! I just have a couple of safety questions, to ease my mind. Annie has a pretty bad peanut allergy; I just wanted to let you know. Also, will someone be monitoring their internet time? ... Great. And finally, my pediatrician has encouraged me to ask this question, because of some pretty bad happenings lately. If you have any firearms, how do you secure them?

5. Hi! Ella and I are excited for our play date tomorrow. I hope you and your daughter can still make it. Just wanted to let you know that we are a pet-free and gun-free home, so no one has to worry about any of those potential dangers. (Never thought I'd put guns in a play-date message, but such is life these days.) We do have a small pool in the backyard, but it's gated and we won't be using it. Do you have any food or other allergies? I want to make sure you feel safe.

6. Hi Barbara. Evan is so excited to come to your house and play with Brett tomorrow. Just wanted to ask you about firearm security, if you have any. We are hunters, so we do keep firearms at our house, but those are stored locked and unloaded in our gun safe, and the ammunition is locked separately. If you have guns, how do you secure them?"

Examples of Homeowner Answers, and Possible Responses:

The following examples show some possible statements by others when asked about the presence of unsecured firearms in their homes or vehicles. We recognize that you may not have immediate answers to some of these potential statements by firearm owners, and in most cases, responsible firearm owners will thank you for the question and let you know that their firearms are securely stored. However, it is important to think about these possible situations ahead of time and prepare your response.

1. We have a gun for security in our home, but we need it really quickly. I don't want to have it locked away.

Response: Yes, I respect that. However there have been too many stories of terrible tragedies which happened because unsupervised children gained access to unsecured, loaded guns in homes. I guess this is why often people use a biometric gun safe, which can be opened in seconds. I think maybe it would be better, if it is ok with you, for your child to come to my house instead, or we could meet at the park.

2. Yes, I have a shotgun under my bed, but the safety is always on.

Response: Oh! I am so sorry, but I'm quite worried about that because my child is quite curious and gets into things. I've heard so many stories of unintentional gun injuries because kids find guns where we think they never will. Perhaps we could have your child come to my house instead?

3. Yes, we have guns and use them for hunting, but they are unloaded, with safety trigger locks and stored in a safe. Ammunition is stored separately. I'm glad you asked!

Response: Oh! That really puts me at ease. I do appreciate the fact that you lock them up. Thanks for letting me know. I've been hearing some crazy stories recently and needed to ask.

4. Wow! I've never been asked that before! I don't have a gun but thank you for asking me. I'll start asking that question myself for my child's play dates in other homes!

Response: I guess nowadays one cannot be too careful! I've read too many news stories lately of tragedies occurring because there were unsecured guns. Although sometimes it feels a bit awkward, I'd rather ask the question than regret not asking later. Did you know that today in the US, over 19 million parents are asking?

5. Yes, I have a gun in my night table, but my kids know not to touch it.

Response: Oh! I'm sorry but I am not sure my child would follow those rules. He is very curious and may get into things he should not. I think maybe it would be better, if ok with you, for your child to come to my house instead, or we could meet at the park.

6. It is really none of your business whether or not we have guns in our house.

Response: Oh, I am sorry if you felt that my issue is whether or not there are guns. It is not. If you do have guns, what I'd really like to ask you is how you store them. I hope you understand how worried I am about this issue, as I've read so many stories lately in the news, about children who gained access to loaded firearms in others' homes and unintentionally shot themselves or someone else.

7. I fully agree that we need to keep guns away from kids. I've drilled into my kids to stay away from guns.

Response: Ok that's great that you've taught your kids about gun safety. But my kids may not react in the same way if they came across a gun. You know kids, they don't necessarily follow the rules, and they are impulsive and curious. I wouldn't want to risk it. I think it would be better, if it is ok with you, for your child to come to my house instead.

8. We do have a gun for protection and my husband is very careful about keeping it away from the kids. He has it on the top shelf of the closet. I don't even think Chris knows it's there, and he can't reach it.

Response: Good to know. Actually, one of the most recent stories that I read about was a boy whose parents didn't think he knew they had a gun and had it stored in the closet. I've read that 75% of children who live in homes with guns know where they are stored, but 39% of parents wrongly think their children are unaware of the guns' location in the home. Honestly, I don't trust my son to know what to do if he saw a gun. I am available on Friday and would love to have the boys over to my house. Would that work for you?

Resources:

"Asking About Secure Gun Storage." See at: Be SMART for Kids. <https://besmartforkids.org/secure-gun-storage/resources/#asking-about-secure-gun-storage>

"Ask to End Family Fire." See at the Brady Campaign.

<https://www.bradyunited.org/programs/end-family-fire/ask-to-end-family-fire>