

PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION

The map displays a heatmap of the United States, with states colored in a gradient from light yellow (low values) to dark red (high values). A large blue circle highlights the central region, which is predominantly red and orange, indicating higher values. The colors transition to yellow and light orange towards the edges, indicating lower values. The states highlighted in the circle include WA, OR, NV, CA, MT, SD, NE, NM, WY, CO, KS, OK, MN, IA, MO, AR, MI, IN, OH, WV, KY, TN, MS, AL, GA, SC, NC, VA, PA, NY, CT, VT, NH, ME, MA, RI, and HI.

About This Companion Report

Building on the findings of the Johns Hopkins Annual Firearm Mortality Report ***Gun Violence in the United States 2023: Examining the Gun Suicide Epidemic***, this new companion report focuses on the urgent and growing crisis of firearm suicide. In response to a troubling rise in firearm suicides, the report highlights evidence-based prevention strategies rooted in public health research. The report provides timely insights to support data-informed public health strategies and meaningful policy action.

About the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions

The Center for Gun Violence Solutions at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health addresses gun violence as a public health emergency and uses objective, nonpartisan research to develop solutions which inform, fuel, and propel advocacy to measurably lower gun violence. Home to some of the nation's leading gun violence prevention experts, the Center conducts rigorous research to drive solutions to save lives. In addition to our researchers, the Center's team includes expertise in the fields of policy, law, implementation, community engagement, and communications. This comprehensive advocacy skill set enables us to impact all phases of the policy change process. Because gun violence disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations, we center our work on addressing these disparities and seek insights from those most affected to develop meaningful solutions. Our team collaborates with legislators, community members, law enforcement, health care providers, fellow advocates, and researchers across the country to drive effective and impactful gun violence solutions.

About the Johns Hopkins Center for Suicide Prevention

The Johns Hopkins Center for Suicide Prevention is the nation's first center housed within a school of public health dedicated to advancing suicide prevention through comprehensive public health approaches. Combining rigorous epidemiologic research, clinical expertise, and innovative methodologies, the Center addresses suicide prevention at both the population and individual levels. Our multidisciplinary team works to understand and reduce rising suicide rates and related disparities that disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. We provide training and resources for researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and families bereaved by suicide to support the translation of evidence into effective, equitable prevention strategies. Through collaboration with state and federal agencies, local partners, health care providers, and those personally affected by suicide, the Center serves as a trusted national resource committed to data-driven, scalable solutions that save lives.

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Social Ecological Model for Firearm Suicide Reduction Recommendations



Public Health Recommendations for Firearm Suicide Prevention

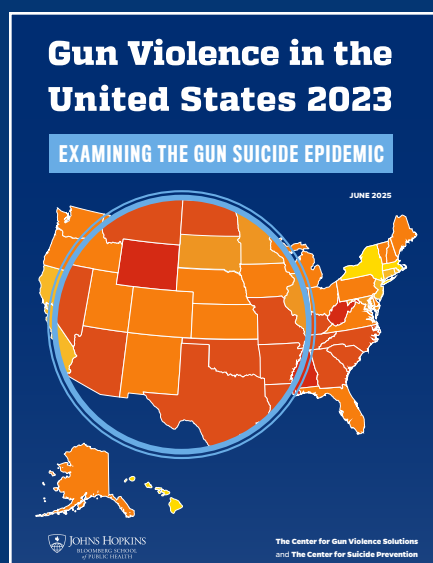
Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States. In 2023, firearm suicide reached an all-time high in both the total number of deaths and overall rate. **Approximately 27,300 individuals died by firearm suicide—averaging one death every 19 minutes.**¹

Over the last five years, over 50% of all deaths by suicide were due to a firearm.¹ While firearms do not increase thoughts of suicide, prior research has shown that suicide attempts involving firearms are far more likely to result in death, with a fatality rate of 90% due to their high lethality.² Furthermore, individuals who have access to guns have 3.2 times the risk of suicide.^{3,4}

Although suicide is a complex issue, it is preventable. Temporarily removing firearms from individuals at increased risk of self-harm significantly reduces the risk of death. While people rarely substitute other suicide methods when firearms are not available, most alternative means are far less lethal, making survival more likely.² Ninety percent of those who survive a suicide attempt do not die from suicide in the future.⁵

There are several frameworks that can be used to approach suicide prevention. A core framework in public health is the **social ecological model**. This framework was developed to illustrate the influence of individual and environmental factors on health and well-being. The evidence-based examples of firearm suicide prevention interventions that are proposed here involve action and intervention across multiple levels (individual, relationship, community, and society) to address the urgent issue of firearm suicide.

[Read the full report here](#)



Individual Level



Examines how personal factors and life experiences may contribute to an individual's risk of suicide.



Safe and Secure Firearm Storage Practice

More than half of all U.S. gun owners do not store all their firearms safely.⁶ Far too often, someone in crisis gains access to a firearm of a family member or friend that is left unlocked. Safe and secure firearms storage can reduce gun injuries and deaths. The gold standard for safe and secure storage is having firearms stored unloaded, locked up, and separate from ammunition. At a minimum, firearms should be stored locked to limit unauthorized access by children or teens and to prevent theft. Research has demonstrated a decreased risk of dying by suicide among adolescents when guns are stored safely.⁷



Voluntary Out-of-Home Storage

When an individual is at increased risk of suicide, storing firearms in a secure location outside the home may be the safest option.⁸⁻¹⁰ Individuals may choose to voluntarily give their firearms to family or friends, a federally licensed firearms dealer, or a local law enforcement agency when they believe they might be at risk of harming themselves.



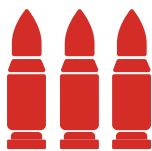
Voluntary Do-Not-Sell Lists

In states that have Do-Not-Sell lists, an individual who is concerned about current or future suicide risk may voluntarily ask to be put on the list, which is accessed during the background check process when a person is attempting to purchase a firearm. The request may be suggested in consultation with a medical provider and is fully reversible.¹¹

Learn more about safe and secure gun storage



*Store firearms
unloaded & locked*



*Store & lock
ammunition
separately from
firearms*



*Ensure the key
and/or combination
is inaccessible to
the person in crisis*



*Temporarily
remove firearms
from your home if
necessary*



Relationship Level

Explores how close relationships—such as those with family, friends, and intimate partners—can affect an individual’s risk of suicide.



Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Petitions by Family and Household Members

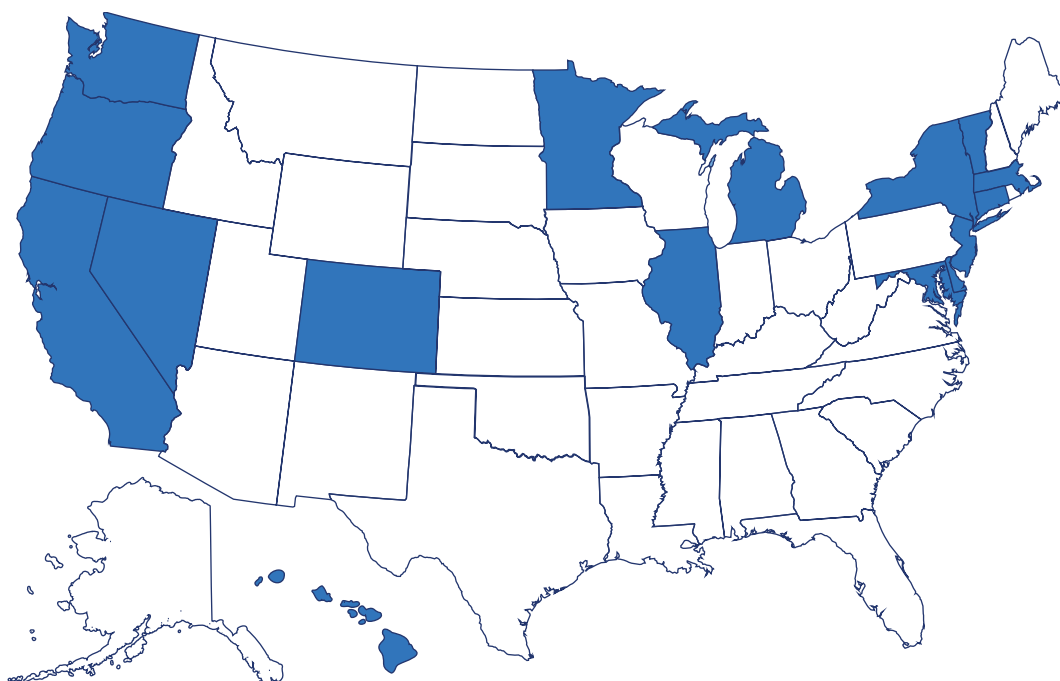
Family and household members can hold valuable information about an individual’s well-being, firearm access, and potential signs of risk. An ERPO is a civil court order petitioned by law enforcement, a family member, or a health care provider that temporarily restricts firearm access for an individual who is behaving dangerously or presents a high risk of harm to self or others.^{13,14} Being able to petition for an ERPO empowers the family and household members to prevent gun violence. Family and household members are eligible to petition for ERPOs in 16 states and the District of Columbia.¹⁴ If they are unable to file an ERPO directly, family and household members can provide relevant information to their local law enforcement agency, which may then initiate a petition.



Out-of-Home Firearm Storage by Family or Friends

Gun storage out of the home provides a safer degree of separation than storage in the home. Family or friends who recognize that a loved one may be at risk of harming themselves may intervene and offer to store the individual’s firearms for the duration of the crisis.¹⁰ Additionally, it is important for the family or friend offering or agreeing to store the firearms to practice safe storage and be aware of the risks associated with firearms in the household.¹⁵

Family & household members are eligible to petition for ERPOs in 16 states





Community Level

Assesses how the social and physical environments—such as neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and community resources—relate to factors that can influence suicide risk.



Gun Storage Maps

Gun storage maps support suicide prevention by connecting individuals with voluntary, temporary safe storage options, especially during times of heightened risk.¹⁶ They have been developed in some states to help community members locate places, such as gun shops or law enforcement agencies, that offer temporary firearm storage.¹⁷ Pierce's Pledge provides a nationwide resource listing Federal Firearms Licensee locations that indicate their willingness and availability to offer voluntary and temporary firearm storage.¹⁸ Considering that temporary transfer laws vary by state, the gun storage maps facilitate access to safe gun storage options outside of the home to prevent suicides.¹⁵



Gun Shop Projects

The Gun Shop Project, developed by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in collaboration with other organizations, builds on partnerships between firearms retailers, ranges, clubs, and public health experts. The Gun Shop Project provides retailers, instructors, and customers of all experience levels with firearm suicide prevention educational materials that allow gun owners to learn the elevated risk of suicide that comes with owning a gun and to take an active role in suicide prevention among their peers.¹⁹



Lethal Means Counseling

Assessing access to firearms and implementing lethal means safety counseling is an essential part of comprehensive health care provider-based suicide prevention programs. Most health care providers receive little to no formal training on how to speak to their patients or clients about firearm safety. Lethal means safety counseling training should include evidence to address common misconceptions, an overview of best counseling techniques including motivational interviewing, information about firearms, tools for health care providers for when individuals report that they have access to a firearm, and important legal information regarding firearm laws at the local, state, and federal levels.²⁰⁻²²



Safety Planning

Safety planning is an evidence-based and effective technique to reduce suicide risk.²³ Working with the patient and the family, clinicians can guide patients to identify effective coping techniques to use during crisis events. Safety plans should be personalized to each patient, be developed collaboratively with each patient and family, be developmentally and culturally appropriate to the patient and family, and include specific activities and strategies that can be used at all times of day. Thinking about safety plans in advance can help patients prepare to get through intense suicidal feelings.²⁴



Societal Level

Examines the broader societal factors, including policies and social norms, that influence overall health.



Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Laws

People who are not otherwise prohibited from owning a gun may be at clear risk of violence to themselves or others. Authorizing a temporary removal of firearms and prohibiting the individual from purchasing, possessing, or accessing firearms while the order is in effect, ERPOs provide an opportunity to intervene to prevent gun violence.¹³ In all states with ERPO laws, law enforcement can petition for an order. In many states, family members can also file a petition, and in a few states, health care providers have this authority as well. ERPOs interact at the societal level by providing an opportunity to remove a firearm at a critical opportunity to intervene and save lives. Research shows that for approximately every 20 ERPOs issued, one suicide was prevented.^{25,26}



Firearm Purchaser Licensing Laws

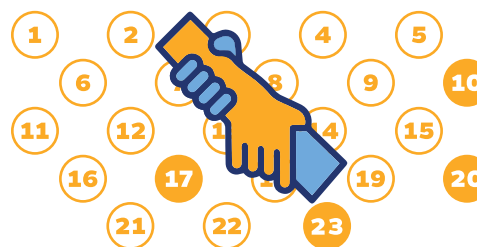
Firearm purchaser licensing (FPL) laws, also known as permit-to-purchase laws, require individuals to apply for and obtain a license before purchasing a firearm.²⁷ There are five evidence-based recommendations for an FPL law to be effective: proof of firearms safety training, fingerprinting, in-person step, comprehensive background checks, and waiting periods. Suicide can result from impulsive thoughts or actions. Putting time and space between a firearm and a person who is at risk of harming themselves can reduce the likelihood that they may use that firearm in a time of crisis. Additionally, the inclusion of suicide prevention training during this process is recommended as an additional prevention measure.



Child Access Prevention Laws

4.6 million minors in the U.S. live in homes with at least one gun that is loaded and unlocked, exposing them to unsupervised access to firearms and increasing the risk of gun violence among children and youth.²⁸ Many of these deaths can be prevented through strong Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws which require that guns stored in households with a child or teen be kept secured when unattended. Strong CAP laws are an effective tool to promote responsible firearm storage practices by holding negligent gun owners accountable when a child gains unauthorized access to a firearm. These laws are linked to sizable reductions in child and teen gun deaths, including reductions in youth suicide.²⁹⁻³¹

A 2024 multi-state study estimated that one life was saved for every 17-23 ERPOs issued.



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From Crisis to Action

PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
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The Center for Gun Violence Solutions
and **The Center for Suicide Prevention**