Preventing Firearm Deaths: It’s Time to Speak

Discussing Firearm Safety with Parents
Reducing Risk of Gun Related Self Harm

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Special thanks to:
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Chair, COIVIPP
Professor of Pediatrics
Credit: Rutgers University

Photo edited by Slate. Photo by Rhona Wise/AFP/Getty Images.

"JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE U.S."
SEARCH FOR ANSWERS IN WAKE OF LATEST MASS SHOOTING

NBC NEWS
What is our role?

Florida SB 432/HB 151 introduced January 2011
- Restricts physician from asking about firearms in the home
- Florida Pediatric Society lobbied against the bill
- Ultimately the bill passed through both legislatures and was signed into law by Gov. Rick Scott June 2011

2017 U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals strikes down the Florida law
Stay in our lane?

2015 – *Call to action to address gun violence as a public health threat*
Endorsed by the American College of Physicians, American College of Surgeons, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist, American Public Health Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, and American Bar Association

2018 – Feud between NRA and medical community following a position paper from American College of Physicians.

2019 – American Association of Medical Colleges starts work on designing medical curricula to train providers on how to promote gun safety, screen for risk and how to help communities cope.

Kathrine Holte, MD
Twitter - #ThisisMyLane
#ThisisOurLane
People with accidental gun related injury almost always require acute medical care

40% of individuals who commit suicide are seen by their primary care provider within the preceding month

SOURCE: SURVEYUSA MARKET RESEARCH STUDY #45454
Objectives

• Discuss the epidemiology of gun injuries in the US

• List risk factors for firearm injury by type (suicide, homicide, unintentional)

• Give examples of provider actions to help diminish firearm injury in their communities

• Describe key advocacy concepts for protecting children and youth from gun violence

• Outline best practice when discussing firearm safety with patients
Gun Violence and Children

FIREARMS ARE THE SECOND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR AMERICAN CHILDREN AND TEENS.

Deaths in 2017:
- Motor Vehicle: 3,669
- Firearm: 3,430
- Cancer: 1,740
- Suffocation: 1,633
- Poisoning: 1,064

SOURCE: CDC, FATAL INJURY REPORTS, 2017

FIREARMS ARE THE FIRST LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH FOR BLACK CHILDREN AND TEENS.

SOURCE: CDC, FATAL INJURY REPORTS, 2017
46 kids and teens shot every day-8 by family fire

<1 survives suicide attempt

3 suicides

31 injured in attack

4 murdered

8 injured unintentionally

Brady Center 2017
Compared to other countries, children in the US (younger than 15) are\textsuperscript{2}:

- 12 times more likely to be killed by a gun
- 17 times more likely to be a gun homicide victim
- 10 times more likely to die of a gun suicide
- 9 times more likely to die of an accidental gun injury
Parents and Gun Storage

Of gun-owning parents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep firearm unlocked and loaded</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep firearm unlocked, unloaded, stored with ammunition</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one gun unlocked</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep firearm locked, unloaded and separate from ammunition</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American Academy of Pediatrics
IN OUR STUDY, 70% OF UNINTENTIONAL SHOOTINGS COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED IF THE FIREARM HAD BEEN STORED LOCKED AND UNLOADED
At what age are kids at risk for gun related injury?
Who Is Strong Enough to Fire a Gun\textsuperscript{4}?

- 25\% of 3 to 4 year olds
- 70\% of 5 to 6 year olds
- 90\% of 7 to 8 year olds
From 2002 through 2016, 1,723 children under age 18 were unintentionally killed by a firearm in the United States

16 of whom were killed in Oregon⁵.

• In 2013, 4-year-old Cody Hall found a loaded gun at home in Donald, Oregon. While playing with the weapon, he turned off the safety and fatally shot himself.

• In 2015, 11-year-old Colton Howard of Malin, Oregon, died after accidentally firing a .22 round into his chest while playing with a loaded rifle he found at home.

• In June 2018, a 13-year-old boy unintentionally shot and killed his best friend while playing with a loaded firearm in Silver Lake, Oregon.
What We Know

• Children commonly live in environments containing unsecured firearms.

• In the US, one out of three homes with children has a gun, and nearly 1.7 million children live in a home with a loaded, unlocked gun.\(^6\)

• Children have the ability to fire guns.\(^4\)

• Little children are **curious**; Big children are **impulsive**.

• Guns are lethal.
Child-focused Education: Does it Work?

• Gun Safety Programs have not been effective.\textsuperscript{7,8}  
  • Ineffective for injury reduction among adults  
  • Not effective on safe storage  
  • Not effective on youth accessing for self harm

• Gun Avoidance Programs  
  • Examples: Eddie Eagle (NRA), STOP (AAP)  
  • A single, small evaluation demonstrates no effect on preschoolers  
  • No effect on youth accessing for self harm.\textsuperscript{9}
“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.”

1992 → 2012, 2017, 2018

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®
Do you talk to your patients about firearm safety?
Evidence Supporting Provider Counseling on Firearms

• Parents are receptive of discussion of risk of guns during pediatric visits\textsuperscript{11}

• Anticipatory guidance on safe storage of firearms is likely to result in more guns being safely stored\textsuperscript{12}

• Receptivity to discussion on firearm safety may differ between owners and non-owners\textsuperscript{13}
Where to start

Ask: families about firearms

Advise: families to secure firearms: unloaded, locked, ammo locked separately; no access to key by kids

Encourage: families to talk to their family, friends, neighbors about the danger of unsecured firearms.

For children with behavioral or mental health issues, advise removal of all firearms from home.
I, uh, caught our kids playing doctor.

"It appears your son loves to draw... on everything."

"The kids kinda got into my old video collection."

"So... your son sorta flooded my bathroom."

"Your daughter has quite the 'adult' vocabulary."

"Is there an unlocked gun in your house?"

Awkward conversations come with being a parent. But one could save your child's life.

www.askingsaveskids.org
Some parents may find it difficult to start this conversation.

Here are some tips to help you start the ASK conversation.

**ASK DAY is June 21st**

It’s a day to share the ASK message and remind parents to ask if there is an unlocked gun in the home where their child plays.

It falls on the first day of summer, marking a time when kids typically spend more time at the homes of friends and other family members.

[www.askingsaveskids.org](http://www.askingsaveskids.org)
Some ideas to start the conversation:

“OK, you might think I’m a bit nervous, but I do worry about the safety of my children when I’m not around. So, I’ve got to ask you... Do you have any guns in the house?”

“Before my child visits, I need you to know he is really curious and can be mischievous. He gets into to everything! So, I’ve got to ask you... Do you have any guns in the house?”

“These cases of kids getting killed or badly injured when they find a gun in the home makes me really worry”
Shooting tolls since 2000, by type of school


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<td>Middle</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>College/university</td>
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COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL
GOOD LUCK BAND

COLORADO SHOOTING
POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS
SUSPECTED

BREAKING NEWS
REPORT: 20 KILLED IN SHOOTINGS AT VIRGINIA TECH CAMPUS
US Firearm Deaths
Total in one year: 39,773

Fatal Injury Reports, 2016, CDC
What do we know?

• ~59% of all deaths by suicide occur with the use of firearms (CDC, 2017)

• 64% of those who die by suicide have had contact with their primary care provider within a year of death.14

• In Oregon >82% of firearm deaths are due to suicide.

• Firearm death in Oregon is in increasing at a rate faster than the rest of the US.
“People who love guns love you”

Addressing the Cultural Challenges of Firearm Restriction in Suicide Prevention: A Test of Public Health Messaging to Protect those at Risk

Background:

Gun owners agree that more needs to be done to reduce gun-related deaths, including suicides, *BUT*...

Discourse about limiting access to firearms gives rise to constitutional concerns and political polarization, often accentuated in rural areas.

Focus groups with firearm owners in rural Oregon communities

-Firearm owners in central Oregon, La Pine Community Health Center Oregon State University
Findings

**Guns are Pervasive:** members of this demographic own multiple firearms, many loaded at all times, often not locked or not stored in secure locations.

**Firearm Safety:** most frequently cited basis of firearm safety has been explicit training of children and young adults, primarily through instruction from family members, and secondarily through formal firearms safety courses.

**Firearm Taboo:** highly inappropriate to ask someone where they keep their guns, how many guns they have, and other details of firearm ownership and safety in the home.

The above suggests that traditional, public health driven, firearm safety discourses (e.g. store ammunition separately from weapons, use a gun safe, impersonal physician in-take forms) may be ineffective for at least some portion of the gun-owning population.

**Crisis Situations:** in discussions of actual and hypothetical mental health crises with the potential for suicide, trust in the person asking the individual to relinquish their firearm is deemed fundamental. A trusted friend or family member can successfully breach the **Firearm Taboo.**
Findings

Trust in Primary Care: extremely important; point blank questions about firearm ownership (including intake checklists) or means restriction from someone who has not established trust are often perceived as threatening and antagonistic; fear of reporting to a government registry, especially among veterans

Suicide Prevention as an Expression of Cultural Values: optimism about efficacy of making culturally-appropriate resources available in a primary care setting; means restriction would be treated as a basic extension of cultural values that emphasize firearm safety (rather than “loss of access”) and care for friends and family
Individuals who take their own lives do so in a number of ways, and firearms are the most common. Some individuals will harm themselves no matter what people do to help, but there is a group of people who, if they make it through the rough patch safely, will go on to live full and happy lives. Because of this, temporarily holding a gun for a loved one or friend can help that person get through stressful periods safely.

If you are the person who is going through a tough time, it may feel risky to give your guns to a friend for safekeeping. We know it’s a big step, but it is just a temporary step until things get better.

Remember that people who love guns love you. Temporarily entrusting guns to a friend or family member might just save a life.

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24/7 at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) With Help Comes Hope

For more information, please visit oregonfirearmsafety.org/firearm-safety/

With Help Comes Hope
We believe firearms are an American way of life—a constitutional right and a necessity in order to protect ourselves and our families.

And with this **RIGHT to bear arms comes RESPONSIBILITY.**

Everyone experiences tough times. During such times, some of us may not be in the right state of mind to be handling weapons.

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**Suicide is Preventable**

Suicide affects us all—more than twice the number of people in America die from suicide than homicides, and more people die by suicide than car accidents each year.

**RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS**

These signs may mean that you or someone you know is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if the behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated, behaving recklessly
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Displaying extreme mood swings

**TAKE ACTION**

- Ask directly if your friend is thinking about suicide. Asking does not put them in danger.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings and accept those feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don’t lecture on the value of life.
- Remove means, such as guns or stored pills, until the crisis passes.
- Check in with your friend regularly. Schedule times to talk in the next week so you can see how they are doing.
- You don’t have to do this alone. Get help from other friends, family members, clergy, doctors and the Lifeline.
- Encourage (and offer to accompany) your friend to seek help and support from a crisis specialist, therapist, doctor, and/or clergy member.

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If you or someone you know are thinking of suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24/7 at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

With Help Comes Hope
Harvard School of Public Health Recommendations:

Speak with the patient’s family and loved ones (with patient permission)

Make a safety plan for patients struggling with mental health problems
- “I’m glad you’re not feeling suicidal. But sometimes a crisis hits and people who are already struggling may suddenly experience strong suicidal feelings. Those feelings often go away in a matter of hours or days, but it can feel like it’ll last forever. I’m not saying this is likely to happen, but if it does, I want to be sure you make it through safely and call for help. Can we talk over a plan, just in case?”

Raise the topic of guns at home
- “Lots of people have guns at home. What some families in your situation do is store their guns away from home until the person is feeling better, or lock them and ask someone they trust to hold onto the keys. If you have guns at home, I’m wondering if you’ve thought about a strategy like that.”

https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/recommendations/clinicians/
Harvard School of Public Health Recommendations:

Sympathize with gun owners who find the option of living without a firearm at home, even temporarily, very difficult.

Locking the firearms up is also an option if the family won’t remove the guns, but it’s not the safest option.

Hiding unlocked guns is not advised. Remember, kids know their parent’s hiding places!

Document in your notes that you’ve reviewed this information with the family.
Gun Locks

• Cable Locks
• Trigger Locks
• Biometric Locks
• Lock Boxes
• Gun Safes
Cable Lock
Trigger Locks
Lockers and Safes

Bedside: Bolted to furniture
Every parent knows..... QUESTIONS?

It just takes a minute.
Summary

• Talk to parents about firearm safety and encourage them to speak to friends and family

• Remove or lock up firearms when there are children in the home

• Collaborate with trusted friends and family to remove firearms from the home of someone struggling with mental health issues.

• Avoid direct questioning and use a culturally appropriate approach when discussing firearm ownership
References


3. Schuster


