



FIREARM SAFETY FOR SENIORS



DID YOU KNOW?

- » Firearm suicides are the leading cause of gun deaths among older adults, accounting for a staggering 70% of suicides in this group. The highest rates are observed in individuals aged 65-69 and 70-74. ¹
- » Firearms are the most common method used in older adult suicides, particularly among men. ²
- » Only 3.7% of older adults reported being asked about firearm safety by a healthcare provider in the past year. ³

THE 5 L'S OF SAFE STORAGE ⁴

- » **LOCKED:** How is the firearm stored? Ensuring firearms are locked away can prevent unauthorized access and add an extra layer of protection for individuals with cognitive impairments.
- » **LOADED:** Is the firearm loaded? Always store firearms unloaded to reduce risk of firearm-related injuries.
- » **FEELING LOW:** Has the owner been experiencing any mental health-related symptoms? Look out for signs of depression, cognitive impairment, and feelings of worthlessness in older individuals, especially during stressful times.
- » **LITTLE CHILDREN:** Are there young children around the firearm? Are grandchildren ever in the house with a gun and potentially at risk?
- » **LEARNED OWNER:** Is the owner aware of safe storage and use practices? Healthcare providers and family members can help educate older gun users and risk factors.

RISK FACTORS

- » Living alone
- » Dementia
- » Veteran status
- » Recent loss of a loved one
- » Recent diagnosis
- » Financial hardship

VETERANS AND SUICIDE RISK ⁵

- » Veterans are more likely to own guns
- » Veterans make up 1 in every 5 adult firearm suicides
- » 75% of veteran suicides involved firearms, the highest proportion in over 20 years.
- » Helpful Tips: Present PTSD as a treatable condition, emphasize help and recovery, avoid assuming all suicides are due to mental health event, share the veteran's crisis line (<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>): 988 then press 1 or text 838255

FOSTERING CONVERSATION

These are questions your physician or behavioral health specialist might ask when starting conversations about firearm safety.

- » Routine Check-Up Introduction: "As part of our routine check-up, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your home environment. Is that alright?"
- » Storage Inquiry: "Can you tell me how you store your handgun? Keeping firearms in a locked container is crucial to prevent accidents, especially if there are children or grandchildren visiting. Would you be open to discussing some options for safe storage?"
- » Mental Health Discussion: "It's also important to talk about how you're feeling. Sometimes, stress or health issues can affect our thoughts about safety and security. Have you been feeling any stress or anxiety lately?"
- » Educational Materials: Providing a handout, such as the SHELTER Safe Storage Handout, can offer additional guidance and support for patients.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE? VISIT THE LINKS BELOW.

- » [Alzheimer's Organization Firearm Safety](#)
- » [Safe Messaging Best Practices Guide](#)
- » [SHELTER Safe Storage Handout](#)
- » [Veteran Affairs, VA SAVE](#)

¹ Price JH, Khubchandani J. Firearm Suicides in the Elderly: A Narrative Review and Call for Action. J Community Health. 2021;46(5):1050-1058

² Price JH, Payton E. Firearm Deaths Impacting Older Adults. J Community Health. 2025; 50, 464–471.

³ Carter PM, Losman E, Roche JS, Malani PN, Kullgren JT, Solway E, Kirch M, Singer D, Walton MA, Zeoli AM, Cunningham RM. Firearm ownership, attitudes, and safe storage practices among a nationally representative sample of older U.S. adults age 50 to 80. Prev Med. 2022 Mar;156:106955. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2022.106955>.

⁴ Pinholt EM, Mitchell JD, Butler JH, Kumar H. "Is There a Gun in the Home?" Assessing the Risks of Gun Ownership in Older Adults. J Am Geriatr Soc 2014;62:1142–6.

⁵ McIntosh JL, Drapeau CW. Suicide in the USA: A Decadal Study From the 1930s to the 2020s. Omega (Westport). 2024 Aug 16:302228241274248.

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