

Secure Firearm Storage Saves Lives



Preventing access to firearms by unauthorized, unsupervised children and teens reduces tragedies of suicides, unintentional shootings, school shootings and homicides. According to the US Secret Service, addressing student access to guns is a critical component of any school-based threat assessment intervention plan.¹

Facts About Gun Violence in Schools and Homes

- Unsecured firearms are often used in school gun violence. The Secret Service found that 76 percent of school shooters under age 18 obtained the gun(s) from their homes or the homes of family members or friends.^{2,3}
- School shooters are also likely to have a connection to the school. 75 percent of active shooters in schools were current or former students of the school.⁴
- Gun violence in schools includes not only mass shootings, homicides, and assaults, but also unintentional discharges, self-harm injuries, and suicide deaths using a firearm.⁵
- Nationwide, approximately 4.6 million children live in a household with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.⁶ The majority of children know where the gun is stored.⁷
- Over 80 percent of children who die by firearm suicide accessed the gun from their own home or that of a family member.⁸
- 90 percent of suicide attempts with a gun result in death—a much higher fatality rate than any other means of self-harm.⁹ 41 percent of child suicides involve a gun.¹⁰
- Every year, nearly 350 children under age 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else.¹¹

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.¹²

MA Safe Storage Law

The MA Safe Storage Law, MA General Law (MGL), Title XX, Ch. 140 § 131C¹³ and § 131L¹⁴ 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 (except for non-large capacity rifles and shotguns which must be transported unloaded but are not required to be in a locked case).

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 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.

Beyond the MA Safe Storage Law, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)¹⁵ and other organizations state that the safest approach to keep children and teens safe is to secure firearms locked and unloaded, with ammunition locked separately.

Safety Begins at Home

Members of school communities are the first line of defense against tragedies that occur due to unsecure firearm storage, *the most common source of firearms used in school gun violence incidents*. We urge firearm owners to practice secure firearm storage at all times, and we ask everyone to spread this message among family members and friends. More information about steps *all adults* can take can be found at besmartforkids.org.

¹ 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. July, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2NKlwqD>.

² 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>.

³ Everytown, AFT and NEA. Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Plan for Preventing Mass Shootings and Ending All Gun Violence in America’s Schools: 2020. Updated 2021.

⁴ New York City Police Department. Active shooters: Recommendation and analysis for risk mitigation. 2016. <https://on.nyc.gov/2GIeBl1>. Everytown’s analysis doesn’t require a definition of “active shooter,” but as used in this report generally, we are referring to shooters actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people at a school.

⁵ Everytown for Gun Safety. Keeping our schools safe: a plan to stop mass shootings and end gun violence in American schools. February 2019. <https://every.tw/2Hjk9cu>.

⁶ Matthew Miller and Deborah Azrael, “Firearm Storage in US Households with Children: Findings from the 2021 National Firearm Survey,” JAMA Network Open 5, no. 2 (2022): e2148823, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.48823>.

⁷ Frances Baxley and Matthew Miller, “Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms,” Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine 160, no. 5 (2006): 542–47, <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542>.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Andrew Conner, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 2 (2019): 885–95, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-1324>.

¹⁰ CDC. National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using five years of most recent available data: 2016 to 2020. Analysis includes children aged 0 to 17.

¹¹ Everytown for Gun Safety. “NotAnAccident Index.” *Everytown for Gun Safety* (2019). everytownresearch.org/notanaccident

¹² 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*. 2005; 293(6): 707-714.

¹³ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter140/Section131C>

¹⁴ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXX/Chapter140/Section131L>

¹⁵ M. J. Bull, et al., “Firearm–related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population,” *Pediatrics* 105, no. 4 (2000): 888–895.