

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Lethal Means Safety: A Suicide Prevention Strategy

Reduced access to lethal means in times of crisis can be an effective way to prevent suicide. By creating barriers to harmful methods, there's more time to provide help and change their mind, ultimately saving lives.

To effectively reduce access to lethal means, suicide prevention advocates must understand which methods are most associated with deaths by suicide. Firearms are often linked to these incidents, especially among veterans and males. Additionally, suffocation and drug overdoses are significant methods noted in various cases. Together, these means account for a substantial number of suicide deaths. Many of these tragedies can be prevented through secure storage strategies.

Lethal Means Safety for Firearms

If someone is at risk for suicide, it is vital to reduce easy access to firearms. There are several ways to do that:

- **Gun lock.** Cable locks can be placed on individual firearms to prevent the trigger from being pulled or to prevent the firearm from being loaded.¹ They are usually included in the purchase of a firearm by licensed gun retailers and can be requested from many local police departments in the state.¹ Care should be taken to ensure that any keys or combinations used for the gun locks are kept away from the person experiencing suicidal ideation.²
- **Gun lockbox/safe.** Though more expensive than gun locks, gun lockboxes and their larger counterparts, gun safes, are also more secure than gun locks.² As in the case with gun locks, combinations should not be accessible to the person considering suicide.²

In both strategies above, ammunition should be locked separately from the firearm or stored outside of the home.²

- **Off-site storage.** Firearms can be stored away from the person considering suicide, such as the home of a trusted friend or a family member.² Check with your local police department to see if it offers free firearms storage to keep firearms out of the hands of someone who is a risk to themselves or others. Gun ranges and gun retailers may have free or rental space available in gun vaults or gun lockers.

Resources

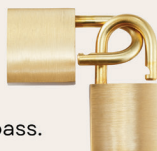
- Life Side Ohio: A campaign of direct suicide prevention outreach dedicated to the firearms community.
<https://www.lifesideohio.org/>
- CALM Training: CALM is a free online course that teaches participants to collaborate with individuals considering suicide as well as their families to assess that individual's access to lethal means and make a plan to keep them safe. <https://zerosuicide.edc.org/resources/trainings-courses/CALM-course>
- Project Childsafe: To find out where you can get a free Safety Kit with a gun lock and instruction manual, visit <https://projectchildsafe.org/>
- Permanent Drug Drop-Off Sites: These sites, often pharmacies, police departments, and drug drop-off boxes, can be used to dispose of expired or unused medication. Visit the following link to find a site near you: <https://safe.pharmacy/drug-disposal/>

Lethal Means Safety for Overdose/Poison

There are several ways to reduce access to substances that can be used for overdose and poisoning:

- **Monitoring.** If there is a risk for suicide, then poisons such as household chemicals, along with medications that can be used for overdose, should be closely monitored. Conduct an inventory of substances that can be harmful if ingested or ingested in large quantities, and maintain awareness of who is using those substances, how often, and why.
- **Lock box.** If the person is at higher risk for suicide, then every effort should be made to lock up or remove substances that can be used for poisoning or overdose.² Medication should be taken as prescribed and stored in lock boxes that can be purchased online and in many stores.² Take care to ensure that the key or combination is not accessible to the person considering suicide.
- **Removal.** Expired or unused medications should be safely discarded in something like a Detera bag that dissolves and deactivates medications in water, taken to a drug drop-off event or box, or otherwise removed from the home.² Household chemicals should be disposed of according to the manufacturer's instructions, usually found on the packaging. There are also Drug Take Back days that can help with medication disposal.
- **Limit Quantities of Medications.** Request prescriptions in non-lethal doses when possible or store the bulk of a medication off site, with only a day or weeks' worth in the home.

Reasons for Secure Storage



- 1 Allows time for the moment of intense suicidal crisis to pass.
- 2 Allows time for someone to intervene with potentially lifesaving support and resources.
- 3 Securely protects children and adults by preventing suicides or unintentional injuries.

References

- 1 Project Childsafe. A Guide to Responsible Gun Ownership, Safe Handling and Secure Storage. <https://projectchildsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PCS-GunLock-Brochure-C4C-Spread13.pdf>. Accessed July 3, 2025.
- 2 American Psychiatric Association. Suicide and Self-Harm: Cultural Connections May Help Protect Hispanic/Latino Youth. 2022. <https://psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/suicide-and-self-harm-hispanic-youth>. Accessed June 30, 2025.

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



(614) 429-1528 / OhioSPF.org

