

Lethal Means Safety; A Suicide Prevention Strategy



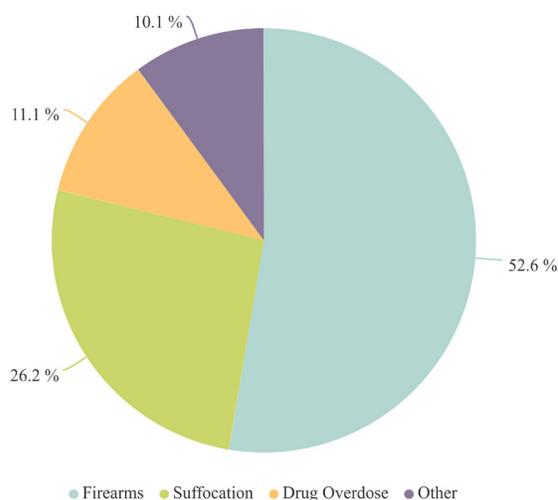
One of the most effective ways to prevent suicide is by separating someone at risk of suicide from materials they can use to kill themselves. This strategy, known as lethal means safety, can be used by someone experiencing suicidal ideation or anyone who is concerned about them, such as a family member, a friend, a medical practitioner, or a behavioral health professional. By putting barriers between lethal means and a person considering suicide, there is more time and opportunity to get them help, change their mind, and save their life.

suicides¹ and 59.6% of male suicides.² Suffocation was cited in 26.2% of Ohio suicides across that same time period,¹ and 11.1% of suicides cited drug overdose, including 28.1% of female suicide deaths.² Together, these methods account for nearly 90% of Ohio suicides in the decade. Many of these suicides can be prevented using safe storage strategies.

locks, combinations should not be accessible to the person considering suicide.⁴

“SAFE STORAGE STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF SUICIDE.”

Methods of Suicides in Ohio, 2010 – 2019¹



Lethal Means Safety for Firearms

If someone is at risk for suicide, it is vital to keep them away from guns and the ammunition required to use them. Below are three ways to reduce access to firearms:

In both strategies above, ammunition should be locked separately from the firearm or stored outside of the home.⁴

To reduce access to lethal means, suicide prevention advocates need to understand which lethal means are most involved in deaths by suicide. From 2010 to 2019, 52.6% of all suicide deaths involved firearms, accounting for 72.5% of veteran

- **Gun lock.** Gun locks come in two varieties: trigger locks and cable locks. Both can be placed on individual firearms to prevent the trigger from being pulled.³ 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.³ 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.⁴
- **Gun case/safe.** Though more expensive than gun locks, gun cases and their larger counterparts, gun safes, are also more secure than gun locks.⁴ As in the case with gun

- **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.⁴ Many police departments offer free firearms storage to keep firearms out of the hands of someone who is a risk to themselves or others,⁴ while gun ranges and gun retailers may have free or rental space available in gun vaults or gun lockers.

Lethal Means Safety for Overdose/Poison

Drug overdose and poisoning are two of the most commonly used lethal means,¹ but safe storage strategies can reduce the likelihood of suicide through both of these methods. Below are three 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 boxes.** 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.⁴ Medication should be taken as prescribed and stored in lock boxes that can be purchased online and in many big box stores.⁴ 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.⁴ Household chemicals should be disposed according to instructions from the manufacturer, usually found on the packaging. There are also Drug Take Back days throughout Ohio, which help with medication disposal.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of strategies to reduce access to lethal means. We encourage you to visit our website for additional resources and to check out the resources listed.

Additional Resources

1. 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>
2. Project Childsafe: To find out where you can get a free Safety Kit with a gun lock and instruction manual, visit <https://projectchildsafe.org/>
3. 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://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s>

Reference List

1. Ohio Veteran Suicide Report November 2020. Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. <https://mha.ohio.gov/static/Portals/0/assets/FamiliesChildrenandAdults/SuicidePrevention/ohio%20veteran%20suicide%20report.pdf?ver=k06QZdrMrdn42dFKP9ZpiQ%3d%3d>. Accessed February 11, 2022.
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4. Taking Action: Recommendations for Clinicians. Means Matter. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/recommendations/clinicians/>. Published September 19, 2018. Accessed February 14, 2022.

This resource is brought to you by the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) with funding from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Learn more about OSPF at OhioSPF.org.