

Did You Know?

As many as one in four individuals who have attempted suicide waited for less than five minutes before acting on the thought.

(Simon et al., 2001)

WHAT IS LETHAL MEANS SAFETY?

Lethal means safety in suicide involves making a method less available and less likely to cause death in a suicide attempt.

The goal is to make suicide methods – or means – more difficult to access when someone is at risk for suicide. Research tells us that putting time and distance between an at-risk individual and a means of suicide is an effective way to prevent suicide death.

Application:

Lethal means safety can be applied to medications, firearms, and other methods used for self-harm. You can use these safety measures to keep yourself and your loved ones safe.

Why is lethal means safety important?

Suicide is a complex issue, but it is absolutely *preventable*. Lethal means safety is important because the time period between thinking about suicide to acting on it is quick – moving from thought to action can last only a few minutes. In fact, as many as one in four individuals who have attempted suicide waited less than five minutes before acting on the thought.¹⁹ Lethal means safety extends the time available for a change of heart or for someone else to intervene. Simply put, removing access and improving lethal means safety can reduce the number of suicides, save lives, and protect you and your family/loved one.

Some risk factors for suicide to be aware of include:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Self-isolation
- Violent behavior
- A history of mental illness treatment
- Recent challenging major life event such as divorce or other romantic relationship challenges, job loss, or financial trouble

We now know what lethal means safety is, and why it is important. So, what does it involve? How do you keep yourself and your loved ones safe when it comes to lethal means safety?



Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and a lethal means of suicide may save a life. The odds of survival go up for three reasons:

1. A personal crisis is often brief.
2. Deadliness of an attempt often depends in part on the method.
3. 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive, do not attempt suicide again.

If someone you know is at risk, help reduce access to lethal means until they are no longer in distress.

¹⁹ Simon, T., Swann, A., Powell, K., Potter, L., Kresnow, M., & O'Carroll, P. (2001). Characteristics of impulsive suicide attempts and attempters. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 32(sup), 49-59.

Did You Know?

Medications are the most common method of non-fatal suicide attempts for Service members.

(DOD Suicide Event Report, CY 2018)

MEDICATION SAFETY

Why safe storage of medications?

We all use medications to address common concerns like headaches or to treat chronic conditions. Most homes have access to medications that help keep us healthy. On their own, they are seen as a means to treat conditions. They can be. However, in some instances, medications can become a means for suicide.

Research tells us that suicide attempts with medications and other drugs have increased in the past few years and are the most common method of non-fatal suicide attempts for Service members.²⁰ Storing medications safely can reduce medication-related suicides and suicide attempts and can help save your life or the life of your loved ones.

SAFELY STORE MEDICATIONS

To help you safely store your medications, we have some tips below:



Do not keep lethal doses of medications on-hand. If you are unsure of what a lethal dose is, talk to your pharmacist who can advise you on safe quantities.



Discuss prescription and non-prescription medications with your doctor or pharmacist. Don't be afraid to ask any questions about proper dosage, side effects, or any other concerns you might have.



Consider locking up all medications. Medication lock boxes are available online and in many pharmacies. Be particularly careful about locking medications that can be abused, such as opioid medications and others. You may be concerned that it would be difficult to access your needed medications with a lock box. This is not the case; many have features that allow for dispensing of the right amount of medication when needed.



Dispose of medications that are no longer needed or are outdated. Go to any military or non-military pharmacy to safely dispose of unwanted, unused, or expired medications.



Drinking alcohol while taking medications can be lethal and can lead to impulsive choices such as a suicide attempt. Keep only small quantities of alcohol in the home and consider that alcohol could not only increase medical complications, it could also increase risk for suicide.

²⁰ Tucker, J., Smolenski, D.J., & Kennedy, C.H. (2019). Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER): Calendar Year 2018 Annual Report.

Did You Know?

Home invasions are a rare event. The majority of firearm deaths are from suicide, not homicide.

(Institute of Medicine Report, 2013)

FIREARM SAFETY

Why secure firearms?

Firearms protection is important in lethal means safety. **Did you know that one of the most lethal and common method for suicide among Service members and their families is via firearm?** (DOD Annual Suicide Report, CY 2019). This makes firearm safety an important factor in keeping you and your family safe.

HOW TO SECURE FIREARMS IN THE HOME

What is safe firearm storage?

To many people, firearm safety is only about the handling of your firearm, but that responsibility also extends beyond safe handling and storage at work or on the range. Securing your firearm at home is just as important.

While firearm owners concerned about self-defense may find this difficult, it is important to compare the potential threat of suicide during times of elevated risk to other threats to the family's well-being.

Options for safe firearm storage:

Safe storage requires a firearm locking device that creates a barrier to unauthorized access or use, separation of firearms and ammunition when not in use, and/or storage in a secure, locked box. It is important to make sure that household members also understand the safety guidelines concerning firearms.

Firearm Safety Tip #1

CABLE LOCKS:

Prevents a firearm from being loaded and fired.



Firearm Safety Tip #2

GUN CASE:

Storage solution to secure, conceal, protect, and legally transport a firearm.



Firearm Safety Tip #3

LOCK BOX:

Provides reliable protection for firearms.



Firearm Safety Tip #4

FULL SIZE GUN SAFE:

Allows you to store multiple firearms in one place.



Did You Know?

More Service members die by suicide via firearm than by combat, accident, homicide, and other means combined.

(CY 2019 DOD Annual Suicide Report, 2020)

HOW TO SECURE FIREARMS OUTSIDE OF THE HOME

When should you consider out of home storage?

Consider increasing firearm security when you or someone in your home is at-risk for misusing a firearm. Weighing the risks and the benefits of storing a firearm outside of the home is an important step towards possibly preventing suicide or other accidents.

Out-of-home storage options:

Before bringing your firearms to any of the places noted in the graphic, call ahead to make sure they can store them.

Some points to consider:

- Risk increases in periods of distress.
- Learning how to use safe storage can help before experiencing challenging times.
- Many do not secure firearms at home.
- As Service members, you are well-versed in the handling and secure storage of firearms, but a family member or friend might not be.
- Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide; attempts by firearm are the most fatal (approximately 90% fatal) and leave less opportunity for assistance or rescue.
- Those who survive a suicide attempt – often from using a less lethal means – go on to live.

In times of distress, consider:

	Family members, friends, or neighbors
	Police department
	Gun shop
	Shooting range
	Armory
	Commercial storage facility
	Pawn shop