

# Gun Safety and Your Health



*Provided by:*



Massachusetts Office  
of the Attorney General



MASSACHUSETTS  
MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Endorsed by:*



Massachusetts Chiefs  
of Police Association



Massachusetts Major  
City Chiefs of Police

## Gun Safety and Your Health

Gun safety is an important part of your health and the public health. Most gun owners are responsible and deeply committed to gun safety. If you are a gun owner, live in a household where there is a gun, or otherwise might come in contact with guns, the following information may help you keep yourself and those around you safe.

Guns in the home are like any other potentially dangerous household risk, such as chemicals in cleaning supplies, backyard pools, alcohol and cigarettes, prescription medication, or fire hazards. With any of these potential hazards, you can take steps to protect yourself and your family.

Talk to your health care provider about any concerns you might have about gun safety and the potential impact on your health or the health of your loved ones.



## Safe Gun Storage

Safe gun storage is critical to the health and safety of you and your loved ones; it's also the law.

Under Massachusetts law, guns must be stored in a way that makes them impossible to operate by any person other than the owner or lawfully licensed user. This means that stored guns must be securely locked.

An owner may be fined or even imprisoned if his or her firearm is kept in a place where minors could access it. This is particularly important because more than two-thirds of gun-related deaths involving children could have been prevented if guns had been stored locked and unloaded.

The safest way to store a gun in your home is unloaded and securely locked, with the ammunition locked in a separate container.

There are many different options for gun storage, including trigger and cable locks, gun cases, lock boxes, gun cabinets,

and gun safes — all of which are widely available online and at various retail locations.

## Making a Gun Less Accessible

Guns in the home increase risk under certain circumstances. You may want to take additional steps to keep your family safe if someone in your household:

- Is a young child
- Is a teenager
- Suffers from suicidal thoughts or depression
- Has a history of violence
- Suffers from a condition that results in an altered mental state such as drug addiction or dementia

Because people in these groups are more likely to accidentally or purposely discharge a gun to hurt themselves or others, additional safety steps for your household might include storing a gun at a remote location, making ammunition inaccessible, deactivating the gun, or disposing of an unwanted gun.

### *Storage at a Remote Location*

As long as a gun is properly stored so that it is inaccessible to unlicensed persons, it does not legally need to be kept in the owner's home. For instance, if a gun is primarily used for hunting, it could be stored in another location when not being used for that purpose. Examples of remote locations might include:

- At another licensed person's home
- In a secure storage unit
- In a bonded warehouse for gun storage
- In a second home

An owner could also store the key to access a gun in a remote location.



### *Making Ammunition Inaccessible*

To reduce the chance that someone in the household uses a gun to hurt himself or herself or others, a gun owner can dispose of ammunition or store it in another location, as long as it can't be accessed by someone without a license.

### *Deactivation*

A gunsmith or other certified professional can make changes to a gun so that it can no longer be fired.



## Disposing of an Unwanted Gun

There are several different options for disposing of a gun that is no longer wanted.

### *Sale to Dealers or Individuals*

Guns can be sold to licensed dealers or individuals. This is often the best option for a legally owned firearm, as it allows the owner to be fully compensated for the value of the weapon.

### *Surrender Programs*

In Massachusetts, anyone can surrender a gun to their local police department. To surrender a weapon, a person should contact the local police department to arrange a time to turn it in. The surrender program offers full immunity from prosecution for possessing the firearm.

### *Gun Buy-Back Programs*



Many cities offer gun buy-back programs, during which gun owners

receive cash, gift certificates, tax credits, or vouchers in exchange for giving their guns to the local police. Some buy-back programs are anonymous and offer immunity from prosecution for possession.

Contact your local law enforcement officials to find out if there is a buy-back program in your area.

### *Donation to Training Programs*

Some law enforcement agencies and gun safety organizations have limited budgets for purchasing weapons and will accept donations to further their training programs.

## *What to Do When a Gun Owner Who Is a Friend or Family Member Is at Risk of Violence, Suicide, or Accidental Injury*

You may want to talk to your friend or family member about safe storage or gun disposal options, as appropriate.

If your concern relates to mental health or substance use, you may want to recommend counseling or treatment. You can also bring your friend or family member to a primary care physician, mental health counseling center, or local emergency department for evaluation.

If you are concerned that someone you know should not have a gun because he or she might be violent, suicidal, or at risk of accidental injury, you can alert the local police.

The police department may revoke a gun license if the person does not meet the licensing requirements or is otherwise unsuitable for gun ownership.





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