Vermont Medical Society

2020-2021
THIRD THURSDAY WEBINAR SERIES
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm
Third Thursday Webinar Series

Date: December 17, 2020
Title: A Crisis in Vermont: Gun Violence & Suicide

134 Main Street, Montpelier, Vermont, 05602
Tel.: 802-223-7898
WWW.VTMD.ORG
CME DISCLAIMER

In support of improving patient care, this activity has been planned and implemented by the Robert Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont and the Vermont Medical Society. The University of Vermont is jointly accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to provide continuing education for the healthcare team.

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CME credit must be claimed within 30 days of participating in the event.
VMS Third Thursday Webinar Series: A Crisis in Vermont: Gun Violence & Suicide

**Speakers:** Rebecca Bell, MD & Thomas Delaney, PhD
**Planning Committee Members:**
Jessa Barnard, ESQ, Catherine Schneider, MD, Stephanie Winters & Elizabeth Alessi

**Purpose Statement/Goal of This Activity:** A prevalent discussion on firearm violence, suicide rates, and the work that’s being done in Vermont to positively impact these trends!

**Learning Objectives:**
1. Understand the relationship between access to firearms and suicide risk.
2. Describe the most important messages to include as part of firearm safe storage counseling.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of devices available for safe firearm storage.

**Disclosures:**
Is there anything to Disclose?    ☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐

Did this activity receive any commercial support?    ☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐

(The CMIE staff do not have any possible conflicts)

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FIREARM INJURY PREVENTION SCREENING AND COUNSELING

Rebecca Bell, MD, MPH
Thomas Delaney, PhD
PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UVM LCOM Educational Technology
Vermont Child Health Improvement Program (VCHIP)
Raj Chawla, MPH
Bruce Kimball
Laurie Gelles, PhD
Rose Martin, MS3

We are grateful for the UVM Larner College of Medicine Frymoyer Scholars award to Dr. Bell that is supporting this work.
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Dr. Bell and Dr. Delaney have no conflicts of interest to disclose
OVERVIEW

Epidemiology of firearm injury and death in Vermont
  • homicide, suicide, unintentional firearm fatalities

Role of the provider in firearm safe storage counseling

Development of module

Safe storage options

Counseling example

Discussion
FIREARM FATALITIES - HOMICIDE
2003-2017, ALL AGES

Total deaths
182,911

Crude rate

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CDC WISQARS
YOUTH FIREARM FATALITIES - HOMICIDE
2003-2017, 0-18 YEARS OLD

Total deaths
19,530

Crude rate

Legend:
- 0.1 to 0.7
- 0.7 to 1.0
- 1.0 to 1.7
- 1.7 to 1.9
- 1.9 to 11.0

CDC WISQARS
FIREARM FATALITIES - SUICIDE
2003-2017, ALL AGES

Total deaths
293,242

Crude rate

1.4 - 5.1
5.1 - 6.8
6.8 - 8.3
8.3 - 9.7
9.7 - 14.4
YOUTH FIREARM FATALITIES - SUICIDE
2003-2017, 0-18 YEARS OLD

Total deaths
9,753

Crude rate
FIREARM FATALITIES - UNINTENTIONAL
2003-2017, ALL AGES

Total deaths
8,750

Crude rate
- 0.0 - 0.1
- 0.1 - 0.2
- 0.2 - 0.4
- 0.4 - 0.7
- No Data
- Suppressed Value
YOUTH FIREARM FATALITIES - UNINTENTIONAL
2003-2017, 0-18 YEARS OLD

Total deaths
1,682

Crude rate

Legend:
- 0.0 to 0.0
- 0.0 to 0.1
- 0.1 to 0.2
- 0.2 to 0.3
- 0.3 to 0.7

CDC WISQARS
How do states compare?

Suicide in States with the Highest and Lowest Gun Ownership Levels, 2000-2002

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<th>Population</th>
<th>High-Gun States</th>
<th>Low-Gun States</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39 Million</td>
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<td>% Of Adults With A Gun At Home</td>
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*WY, SD, AK, WV, MT, AR, MS, IO, ND, AL, KY, WI, LA, TN, UT
**HI, MA, RI, NJ, CT, NY

Where there are more guns, there are more suicides.
**Introduction:** Determining whether the prevalence of gun ownership is associated with youth suicide is critical to inform policy to address this problem. The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between the prevalence of household gun ownership in a state and that state's rate of youth suicide.

**Methods:** This study, conducted in 2018, involved a secondary analysis of state-level data for the U.S. using multivariable linear regression. The relationship between the prevalence of household gun ownership and youth (aged 10–19 years) suicide rates was examined in a time-lagged analysis of state-level household gun ownership in 2004 and youth suicide rates in the subsequent decade (2005–2015), while controlling for the prevalence of youth suicide attempts and other risk factors.

**Results:** Household gun ownership was positively associated with the overall youth suicide rate. For each 10 percentage-point increase in household gun ownership, the youth suicide rate increased by 26.9% (95% CI=14.0%, 39.8%).

**Conclusions:** Because states with high levels of household gun ownership are likely to experience higher youth suicide rates, these states should be especially concerned about implementing programs and policies to ameliorate this risk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Suicide rate (per 100,000)</th>
<th>Household gun ownership prevalence (%)</th>
<th>Severe negative affect prevalence (%)</th>
<th>Suicide plan prevalence (%)</th>
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Survivors of near-lethal suicide attempt:
- 24% spent <5 mins between decision and attempt
- Impulsive attempts more likely to be violent
- Impulsive attempters less likely to be depressed
Right To Self-Defense Versus Suicide Prevention: Lawmakers Consider Waiting Period For Gun Sales

By PETER HIRSCHFIELD  •  FEB 28, 2019

Alyssa and Rob Black, whose 23-year-old son died by suicide in December, asked lawmakers Thursday to create a waiting period for gun purchases in Vermont.

PETER HIRSCHFIELD / VPR
90% of people who survive near-lethal suicide attempts do not go on to die by suicide

Those who attempt suicide with firearms (compared to other methods):
- Almost always die
- Have made the attempt impulsively
- Are less depressed

Important to screen for accessibility to firearms among all adolescents — even if not exhibiting suicidal ideation

Young people who use firearms in a suicide are often experiencing a crisis
On average, in Vermont, firearms cause:

- **39** ED Visits and Hospitalizations, and
- **74** Deaths each year.
Case-control study

Cases: incident where child/adolescent <20yo shot a firearm intentionally or unintentionally injuring self or others

Controls: homes with children and firearms without shooting incident

Conclusion: 4 methods of storage each had protective plus additive safety effect:
- Storing gun locked
- Storing gun unloaded
- Storing ammunition locked
- Storing ammunition in separate location
43% of all Vermont households store firearms in or around the home.

17% of households with firearms in the home keep a firearm loaded.

65% of households with a loaded firearm in the home keep a firearm unlocked.

7% of all Vermont households have a loaded firearm in the home.

5% of all Vermont households have a loaded firearm in the home that is unlocked.
Firearm Storage Safety
2018 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

About 13,000 Vermont Households

- 43% of all Vermont households store firearms in or around the home.
- 17% of households with firearms in the home keep a firearm loaded.
- 65% of households with a loaded firearm in the home keep a firearm unlocked.
- 7% of all Vermont households have a loaded firearm in the home.
- 5% of all Vermont households have a loaded firearm in the home that is unlocked.
WHY FIREARM SAFE STORAGE COUNSELING?

Firearms are the most common method used in suicide deaths in Vermont – more than any other method combined.

At the state level, the percentage of household gun ownership more predictive of youth suicide death rate than percentage of youth screening positive for symptoms of depression, suicide planning, or suicide attempts.

Storing firearms safely reduces risk of firearm injury or death generally, including suicide and accidental injury.

5% of all VT households have a firearm that is loaded and unlocked.
INCREASED FIREARM SALES

Americans have bought record 17m guns in year of unrest, analysis finds

Sales surged in the spring amid coronavirus fears and climbed higher during protests for racial justice

Suicidal Ideation Among Individuals Who Have Purchased Firearms During COVID-19

Michael D. Anestis, PhD,1,2 Allison E. Bond, BA,3 Samantha E. Daruwala, MA,3 Shelby L. Bandel, MS,3 Craig J. Bryan, PsyD, ABPP4

Introduction: Given the increase in firearm purchases during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study seeks to determine the extent to which COVID-19 firearm purchasers differ in terms of suicide risk from nonfirearm owners and firearm owners who did not make a purchase during COVID-19.

Methods: Participants (N=3,500) were recruited through Qualtrics Panels to participate in an online survey examining methods for self-protection. ANCOVAs were utilized to assess suicidal ideation. Multivariate ANCOVAs were used to examine firearm storage practices and storage changes during COVID-19. Data were collected in late June and early July 2020, and analyses were conducted in July 2020.
POSSIBLE COVID-19 IMPACTS & REBOUND EFFECTS

US and VT suicide and self harm rates have not increased since March 2020. However, negative mental health impacts associated with COVID-19 have increased:

- Overall increased negative impacts, 32% - 53% (sleeping, substance use, worse chronic conditions, etc.)
- Increased social isolation
- Job losses and economic stresses

October 2020 review study² (n=8) showing some evidence for increased suicidal ideation and acts following previous pandemics:

- Increased suicide deaths and attempts, particularly in older people, in the year following pandemic start
- Linkage between COVID-19 related distress and past month suicidal ideation

ROLE OF PROVIDER IN FIREARM SAFE STORAGE SCREENING AND COUNSELING

Healthcare providers are in a strong position to support families around safely storing firearms.

- Typically see children at least annually
- Conducting safety screenings already
- Evidence for the effectiveness of firearm safe storage interventions
- But, screening and counseling are not occurring as often as they could

Reasonable to expect that similar screening and counseling efforts by non-physician providers will also provide a benefit
ROLE OF PROVIDER: POSSIBLE BARRIERS

Barriers to effective screening and counseling:

- Lack of provider knowledge/confidence regarding firearm safe storage
- Not knowing an effective approach to starting the conversation
- Not wanting to alienate patients/clients

Promising solution: Self-directed e-learning modules on firearm safe storage
UNIQUE COMPONENTS OF LEARNING TOOL

Short
Concisely reviews firearm safe storage options
Focuses on “How” to counsel rather than “Why”

Demonstrations of scripts with unique components:
“How are firearms stored in and around the home?”
- Presumes firearms present
- Open-ended question to facilitate discussion
- No active recording of response

Discuss prevention of theft as motivator for safe storage
Encourages families without firearms to ask about unsecured firearms where their kids play
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Average Agreement Scores (Pre vs Post, n=9)

- I have adequate knowledge of the risks patients are exposed to regarding unsafely stored firearms: Pre 1.0, Post 2.1
- I am confident in my ability to ask patients and families about children’s access to firearms: Pre 1.8, Post 2.1
- I am confident in my ability to discuss firearm safe storage options with patients and families: Pre 1.0, Post 2.2
SAFE STORAGE OPTIONS
# FIREARM STORAGE OPTIONS

To prevent avoidable injury and to protect our families and children, firearm safety must be a priority. You can help to ensure that firearms do not get into the wrong hands by using proper firearm storage in your household. The 5 most common storage solutions available are listed here for your review.

| **CABLE LOCK** | **PRICE RANGE | $10-$20** |
|----------------|--------------|
| ![Cable Lock Image](image) | A cable runs through the barrel or action of a firearm to prevent it from being accidentally fired, requiring either a key or combination to unlock it.  
  
  + Long cables may be threaded through several guns; inexpensive.  
  
  - Thin cables could be cut. |

| **TRIGGER LOCK** | **PRICE RANGE | $5-$35** |
|------------------|--------------|
| ![Trigger Lock Image](image) | A trigger lock is a two-piece lock that fits over the trigger guard so that the trigger cannot be pulled. A push-button keypad, combination, or key will open the lock.  
  
  + Inexpensive; widely available; quick access (keypad models).  
  
  - Some models will not prevent access by older children or teens; may not prevent theft, as some locks may be removed later; may break easily. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCK BOX</th>
<th>PRICE RANGE</th>
<th>$40-$200+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lock box is a small safe designed to store a handgun and other valuables. Using a key, a push-button, or a combination unlocks the safe. Electronic lock boxes are also available and allow access through a digital keypad or fingerprint.</td>
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<tr>
<td>+ Quick access if the lock is push-button or digital; difficult to steal if permanently mounted; may allow storage for more than one handgun; keeps gun out of sight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Costs more than trigger locks or chamber locks.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUN VAULT / SAFE</th>
<th>PRICE RANGE</th>
<th>$100-$2,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A gun vault or safe allows for the safe storage of multiple firearms in one place. Safes come in a variety of sizes designed to store long guns, handguns, or other valuables. Access is gained through a push-button, combination, or digital key pad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>+ Allows storage of numerous long guns and handguns; difficult to steal; allows storage of other personal items; Usually fire resistant; keeps valuables out of sight.</td>
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<td>- Costs more than chamber locks or lock boxes; heavy and difficult to move.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONALIZED LOCK</th>
<th>PRICE RANGE</th>
<th>$200+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gun makers or owners can install a permanent safety device on their gun. These types of special locks vary. Some locks may be a built-in key or combination lock, while others are specially designed with a magnetic or electronic lock that only the owner can fire while wearing a special ring or bracelet. Some personalized locks use fingerprint recognition technology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>+ The safety device is permanently attached to the gun.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Custom addition to a gun and often expensive.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

DISCLAIMER: Mechanical locking devices can fail and should not be used as a substitute for safe gun handling, firearm safety training, and the observance of all gun-safety rules.
KEY POINTS

Firearms are a highly lethal and prevalent means used by young people and adults to take their lives

Health care, mental health, substance abuse treatment and other clinicians are well positioned to screen and counsel for safe storage of firearms

Storage Best Practices

- All firearms locked and unloaded
- Ammunition locked up and stored separately

Contact: Thomas.Delaney@uvm.edu
Rebecca.Bell@uvmhealth.org
How do you currently approach firearm safe storage counseling in your practice?

- Which patients do you counsel?
- How did you determine your approach?

What have been the barriers to screening and counseling? Successes?

- Are there particular scripts you use or avoid when having this conversation?
- Do you provide materials to patients?

Is this training format (online module) useful for your practice?

What other resources do you need to make changes in this area?

Besides safe storage, what other firearm-related topics are you interested in exploring?