

Medication Safety Risks

Securely and safely storing medications when not in use prevents accidental poisoning among children and keeps homes safe. If you or someone you know struggles with thoughts about hurting themselves or suicide, storing medications securely may prevent an intentional overdose.

Safe Practices for Medication Storage

SECURE YOUR MEDICATIONS TO PREVENT INTENTIONAL OR UNINTENTIONAL OVERDOSE

- Ask a family member or friend to manage your access to medications.
- Portion out pills for the week in a medication pillbox and lock the rest away.
- Store over-the-counter (OTC) medications securely in a lockbox, lockable cabinet or drawer away from food items.

CHECK AND DISPOSE OF MEDICATIONS

- Inspect and dispose of any medications past the expiration date.
- Dispose of any medication unused in the past 12 months.

FOR OPIOID USERS

- Ask your doctor for a prescription of Naloxone - an antidote for opioid drug overdose - if using prescribed or illicit opioid medications (e.g., fentanyl, oxycodone, morphine).
- Learn usage of opioids and store securely in a locked cabinet or other space away from children or pets.

DISPOSE OF MEDICATIONS RESPONSIBLY

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about options for disposing of unused medications.
- Utilize VA Medication Take Back Days at your local VA Medical Center.
- Take unused medications to your local pharmacy.
- Request a medication return envelope from your VA prescriber.
- Locate a medication disposal site by using the locator tool provided by The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main>

Resources

To help keep your Veteran and family safe, several crisis resources and centers are available. Visit our resources for more valuable information and support on owning a firearm, living in a household with firearms, or taking prescription medications.

BESMARTFORKIDS.ORG

<https://besmartforkids.org/secure-gun-storage/resources/#asking-about-secure-gun-storage>
(AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH)

SECURE FIREARMS STORAGE RESOURCES

<https://keepitsecure.net> (IN ENGLISH)

THE U.S. DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main> (IN ENGLISH)

VA CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM DIRECTORY

The caregiver support line at **1-855-260-3274**

- https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/New_CSC_Page.asp (IN ENGLISH)
- <https://va.buildingbettercaregivers.org/> (IN ENGLISH)

PROGRAM OF GENERAL CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES

https://www.caregiver.va.gov/Care_Caregivers.asp
(IN ENGLISH)

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

- <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net> (IN ENGLISH)
- <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/es/> (IN SPANISH)

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year in both English and Spanish.

To reach Veterans Crisis Line, dial **988** then **press 1**, chat online at [veteranscrisisline.net/chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/chat), or text **838255**.



Secure Firearm and Medication Storage for Hispanic/Latino Veterans and Family Members

You can protect the health and well-being of yourself and your family by securely storing firearms and medications in your home.



How to Recognize Suicide Risk

There are proactive steps you can take to protect yourself, your Veteran, and your family, especially during times of crisis, mental health concerns, or when thoughts about harming others arise.

SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MAY BE AT RISK OF SUICIDE:

- Talking or joking about death or suicide
- Feeling extremely sad, anxious, or angry
- Changes in behavior, such as withdrawing from friends or family, mood swings, or taking dangerous risks
- Using drugs or alcohol more often
- Feeling nervous, tired, or having physical pain or stress

How to Talk to Your Family Member About Suicide

If you are worried about a friend or Veteran family member, ask them directly about suicide and encourage them to seek help.

Asking someone if they are thinking about suicide can result in less thoughts of suicide and will not “put the idea in their head.” Some Veterans may find it embarrassing or shameful to talk about their mental health. If they refuse to talk, respect their privacy – but don’t be afraid to try again later.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

“I have noticed you haven’t been yourself lately, would you like to talk about it?”

“I’m concerned about you. Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?”

For more tips on how to talk to a Veteran about suicide risk, visit:
https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention

Ask a primary care physician, mental health counseling center, or local emergency department for help. The Veterans Crisis Line also offers free, confidential support and crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year in both English and Spanish. To reach the crisis line, dial 988 then press 1, chat online at veteranscrisisline.net/chat, or text 838255.

Secure Firearm Storage and Suicide Prevention for Women Veterans and their Families

- Nearly half of all Veterans own a firearm.
- Owning a firearm raises suicide risk 2 to 5 times for all household members and makes using firearms as a method of suicide more likely.
- 1 in 4 individuals attempt suicide within just five minutes of deciding to do so. Secure firearm storage prevents suicide by putting time and space between a person in crisis and a lethal method of self-harm, allowing for the crisis to resolve or lessen.

How to Keep Firearms Securely Stored



Keep firearms **unloaded** when not in use



Securely **lock** firearms with the **safety activated**



Use a cable/trigger lock or place in a secure lockbox



Store ammunition in a separate location from firearms



In times of crisis, ask a significant other to temporarily store household firearms



Talk to health, primary care, or reproductive health provider about firearm access and storage

How to Talk to Your Family About Secure Firearm Storage

Some family members of Veterans live in a household with a firearm that is not in their possession and may feel they do not have a say over how it is stored. However, just like having a plan for a fire, tornado, or other emergencies, having a plan for firearm storage helps keep everyone in the home prepared and safe.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

“I heard a story on the news that made me want to ask – do you have any firearms? How are they stored?”

“The kids are excited to come visit you! Before we come over, I wanted to check if you had firearms and if so, how do you store them?”

Further tips on how to ask your Veteran family member about firearm storage can be found at:

<https://besmartforkids.org>

<https://besmartforkids.org/secure-gun-storage/resources/#asking-about-secure-gun-storage>



CABLE LOCK
Price: \$10-\$50



LOCKBOX
Price: \$25-\$350



GUN SAFE
Price: \$200-\$2,500

Visit <http://keepitsecure.net> for additional secure firearm storage options.
To request a gun lock from your local VA medical facility, visit:
<https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>