

Firearm Storage Maps: A Pragmatic Approach to Reduce Firearm Suicide During Times of Risk

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Background: Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in Colorado, and temporary out-of-home firearm storage is an evidence-based suicide prevention strategy meant to reduce access to lethal means. However, there are significant barriers to out-of-home firearm storage, including a lack of knowledge about locations that offer such services. We sought to develop a first-of-its-kind virtual map that lists locations that consider requests for temporary, voluntary firearm storage.

Methods: We systematically contacted every Colorado law enforcement agency and gun shop via phone and/or email to identify locations that consider requests for temporary, voluntary firearm storage and that were willing to be listed on a publicly available online resource. The map was built on the Google Map platform.

Results: Of 471 gun retailers and 215 law enforcement agencies contacted, 61 Colorado locations (46 retailers and 15 law enforcement agencies) considered requests for temporary firearm storage and were willing to be publicly listed. Overall, temporary gun storage locations were located in 50% (32/64) of Colorado counties. The firearm storage map is available at <https://coloradofirearmsafetycoalition.org/gun-storage-map/> and has received 37,034 site visits to date.

Conclusion: Our experience demonstrates that firearm storage maps can support harm reduction approaches to prevent firearm-related injury and death, although significant practical and legal challenges remain. Future investigations should help clarify if firearm storage maps change patterns of firearm storage and/or help physicians and behavioral health evaluators provide more effective lethal means counseling to patients at risk of suicide.