

The messenger matters in safe gun storage, suicide prevention education

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Law enforcement and those in the military, rather than doctors and celebrities, are the most preferred messengers on firearm safety, a Rutgers study found.

The findings, published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, can help communicate the importance of safe [firearm](#) storage and reduce the rate of suicides, Rutgers researchers say.

"We know that safe firearm storage is a key component to suicide prevention, but that belief is not widespread among firearm owners," said lead author Michael Anestis, executive director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and an associate professor of Urban-Global Public Health at Rutgers School of Public Health. "No matter how clear the message is, if it is being delivered by the wrong person, it is not going to have the desired effect."

Although "means safety," which emphasizes storing firearms so they are not readily available, has been shown to decrease suicide rates, researchers say the message will only take hold when clearly conveyed by a trusted source.

In the Rutgers study, 6,200 firearm owners in the United States were asked to rank 14 groups—which included firearm dealers, firearm show managers, the National Rifle Association, family, friends and co-workers—as trusted sources for messages about safe firearm storage.

They found that while law enforcement and military personnel ranked at the top, physicians and celebrities were the least-preferred messengers. Although both white and Black firearm owners had similar rankings for messengers overall, white firearm owners more strongly preferred [law enforcement](#), [military veterans](#), current [military personnel](#) and the National Rifle Association than did Black firearm owners, who preferred casual acquaintances, friends or co-workers, gun show managers, [medical professionals](#) and celebrities more than White firearm owners did.

"Our results show that certain groups like service members and veterans may be the best choices to voice the messages on safe storage, but they also show that not every community will view the same messenger the same way," Anestis said.

More information: Michael D. Anestis et al, An examination of preferred messengers on firearm safety for suicide prevention, *Preventive Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106452](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106452)

Provided by Rutgers University

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