

Unsafe firearm storage is common among veterans with suicidal ideation, study finds

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Unsafe firearm storage is common among California veterans with a history of suicidal ideation, according to a study published today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

Using data from the center's 2021 California Health Interview Survey, the study's authors found that 18.4% of [veterans](#) who lived in a home

with firearms and had ever thought of [suicide](#) had at least one [firearm](#) currently stored loaded and unlocked. Overall, 36.0% of veterans who had firearms in their home had at least one of them stored unlocked.

Among veterans who lived in a home with a firearm, 18.0% said they had needed professional help for an emotional, mental health or substance use problem in the past year.

The authors say the findings suggest an urgent need for mental health and substance-related services for veterans, along with programs promoting secure gun storage—for example, free locking devices or out-of-home storage options—to reduce the possibility of firearm injuries and suicide.

"Suicide by firearm is the leading cause of suicide death among veterans," said Ninez Ponce, director of the center and principal investigator for the California Health Interview Survey. "Creating programs that would facilitate the secure storage of guns is a critical first step toward ensuring the safety of those struggling with thoughts of suicide, especially California veterans."

Additional findings from the study:

- 38.1% of veterans in California lived in a home with a firearm.
- Among those veterans with a firearm at home, 13.9% reported that at least one was stored loaded and unlocked. Among nonveterans with a firearm at home, that figure was 6.8%.
- 14.1% of veterans in California reported having seriously considered suicide at some point in their life.

"Easy access to a loaded firearm is an important risk factor for suicide," said the study's lead author, Joseph Simonetti, an assistant professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Aurora. "It's concerning

to see that this many veterans who have previously thought about ending their lives keep firearms loaded and unsecured in the home.

"We need to figure out better ways to meet the [mental health](#) needs of our veterans through VA and non-VA health care systems and to encourage voluntary secure firearm storage options both in and out of the home."

More information: Study: [healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publicat ...
tail.aspx?PubID=2415](https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publication/tail.aspx?PubID=2415)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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