

Researchers find firearm owners have gaps in their knowledge about proper lock installation on firearms

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Credit: Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

Using cable locks to secure firearms can help reduce the risk of suicide and unintended discharges, but many people can't tell if the devices are

properly installed, according to a Rutgers Health–led study.

Cable locks are among the most widely available secure storage options, as they are provided with many legal firearm purchases and distributed widely by [health care providers](#). Unlike many other storage options, cable locks must be installed correctly to be effective.

"Cable locks are a bit different from other secure storage options because, if not installed correctly, the firearm can still be operable," said Shelby Bandel, [clinical psychology](#) doctoral candidate with the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers University and lead author of the study focused on understanding a person's ability to determine if a lock is installed correctly.

The researchers, whose [study](#) appears in the journal *JAMA Network Open*, examined data from 3,462 United States residents.

Participants were presented a series of photos in which cable locks were either correctly or incorrectly installed on four types of firearms—pistol, revolver, rifle and shotgun—and were asked to identify which photos demonstrated proper installation. For most firearms, correct cable lock installation means the lock is looped through the ejection port and out the magazine well.

Overall, results suggest both firearm owners and people who don't own firearms have gaps in their knowledge about cable lock installation on firearms. Both firearm owners and people who don't own firearms were more able to accurately identify when cable locks were incorrectly installed relative to correct installation.

For example, 98.3% of firearm owners correctly identified when a lock was incorrectly installed on a rifle, whereas 62.7% of firearm owners identified correct installation on the same firearm.

For most photos, firearm owners were more able to accurately identify correct and incorrect installation compared with those who didn't own firearms. Specifically, 67% of firearm owners correctly identified when a cable lock was correctly on a pistol relative to people who don't own firearms, of whom 28.5% correctly identified the photo.

Both firearm owners and people who don't own firearms were less able to accurately identify when cable locks were installed correctly on a revolver relative to other types of firearms.

"It is important that we understand an individual's ability to determine if locks are installed correctly to better understand how these locks may be used in the real world," said Bandel, adding the results from the study suggest there may be instances in which individuals are using cable locks in a way which doesn't secure the firearm.

"These results highlight that cable lock distribution efforts must include education about how to use the locks to ensure they can serve the function of securing firearms."

"These results show that simply providing a cable lock is not enough," said Michael Anestis, executive director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and senior author of the study.

"We already know that cable locks are one of the [least preferred forms of firearm locks](#) among [firearm](#) owners and this might be fueled in part by confusion about how they work. If we want these tools to save lives, we need to make sure we are helping people know how to properly use them."

More information: US Residents' Recognition of Proper Use of

Firearm Cable Locks, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). DOI: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.15064](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.15064).
[jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen.2024.15064](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/article/2024.15064)

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