

## Survey: Patients OK with doctors discussing guns

October 4, 2016

Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

**Article type:** [Health Briefs](#)

**Topics:** [Injury, Violence & Poison Prevention](#) , [Safety](#)

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- Betz ME, et al. *Ann Intern Med.* July 26, 2016, <http://bit.ly/2ciEd5e>.

Many people believe it's appropriate for doctors to discuss firearms with their patients, according to a new study.

The research comes in the wake of 33,599 deaths and 81,000 injuries related to firearms in 2014.

"Many pediatric shootings could be prevented through safe firearm storage or by not having firearms in homes with children (as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics)," the authors wrote.

However, in some states like Florida, lawmakers have been trying to make it harder for doctors to talk to patients about guns.

To better understand patients' views, researchers analyzed survey data from 3,914 adults with a mean age of 49 who were split about equally between the sexes. Just over one-third said they or someone they live with owns a gun.

About 66% of respondents said doctors talking to patients about firearms is appropriate at least sometimes. Among gun owners, 54% said it is at least sometimes appropriate. Gun owners were more likely to feel that way if they had a child at home or believed suicide risk increases when firearms are in the home.

"A doctor working with a patient with depression or risk factors for suicide should suggest that the patient considering making firearms less accessible until they recover, for example by storing the guns away from home," co-author Marian Betz, M.D., M.P.H., said in a news release. "And doctors are wise to recommend to parents of children or teenagers that they keep any household guns locked."

The percentage of those who are OK with doctors discussing guns was not as high as those who feel it is appropriate for doctors to discuss seat belts, tobacco or alcohol. The authors suggested discussions on guns be "factually accurate and represented in a way that neither overstates risks nor alienates patients."

“Patients can always decline to answer those questions,” Dr. Betz said. “But that shouldn't deter a physician from bringing up the topic — in a respectful, nonjudgmental way — when relevant.”

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