

Vanderbilt Child Health Poll: Most Tennessee parents agree on evidence-based safe firearm storage

A new analysis of the Tennessee Child Health Poll data finds that most Tennessee parents who own firearms agree with ways to safely store their firearms that have been shown through peer-reviewed research to reduce the risk of unintended harm to children.

Roughly three-quarters of Tennessee parents who self-disclosed in the poll they are firearm owners agreed that firearms should be stored unloaded in a locked box or safe, with a trigger or cable lock and separate from ammunition. Several studies have shown that weapons that are stored unloaded in a locked box or safe, with a trigger lock and separate from ammunition are the only proven way to reduce the risk of harm to children when there are guns in the home.

“Previous research shows that when firearms are securely stored the risk of death from unintentional injury is reduced by 85%, and death due to suicide is reduced by 78%. Tennessee parents recognize the importance of safe storage to keep kids safe,” said Kelsey Gastineau, MD FAAP, a pediatric hospitalist at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt.

More than 1,000 Tennessee parents were polled in the fall of 2022 about ownership of firearms and how they feel about storing them safely. Parents were given a series of affirmative statements about gun storage and asked to rate their level of agreement. For example, 78% of parents who said they owned firearms strongly agreed that “a gun should be stored unloaded.”

Agreement was similar to other statements about storage. More than 87% agreed that “a gun should be stored securely in a lock box or safe,” and more than 78% agreed that “a gun should be stored securely with a cable lock or trigger lock.”

“At the end of the day, this is all about saving children’s lives,” said John C. “Jay” Wellons, III, MD, MSPH, Cal Turner Professor and chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Monroe Carell. “These are straight forward measures to reduce the incidence of gun violence that involve our children.”

A smaller majority of parents who do not own firearms agreed with the statements about safe storage supported by research.

Less than half of parents who own guns (48%) agreed that it was OK to store the weapon high in a closet out of reach of children while 22% of parents who do not own guns agreed that it was OK to store the weapon out of reach.

“Kids are curious and often know where firearms are stored, even when their parents don’t think they do. It only takes a moment for an oversight to turn into a tragedy,” Gastineau said. “That’s why secure storage of firearms, a solution backed by evidence and support of parents, is so important to prevent these tragedies from occurring.”

The [Vanderbilt Child Health Poll](#) is conducted annually to gauge parents’ concerns about a wide range of topics. The data, collected from a representative sample of Tennessee parents across each of the three grand divisions of the state, focus on child health issues ranging from

education and schooling to food security, insurance status, and mental health. The research was funded in part by a grant from the Boedecker Foundation.

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