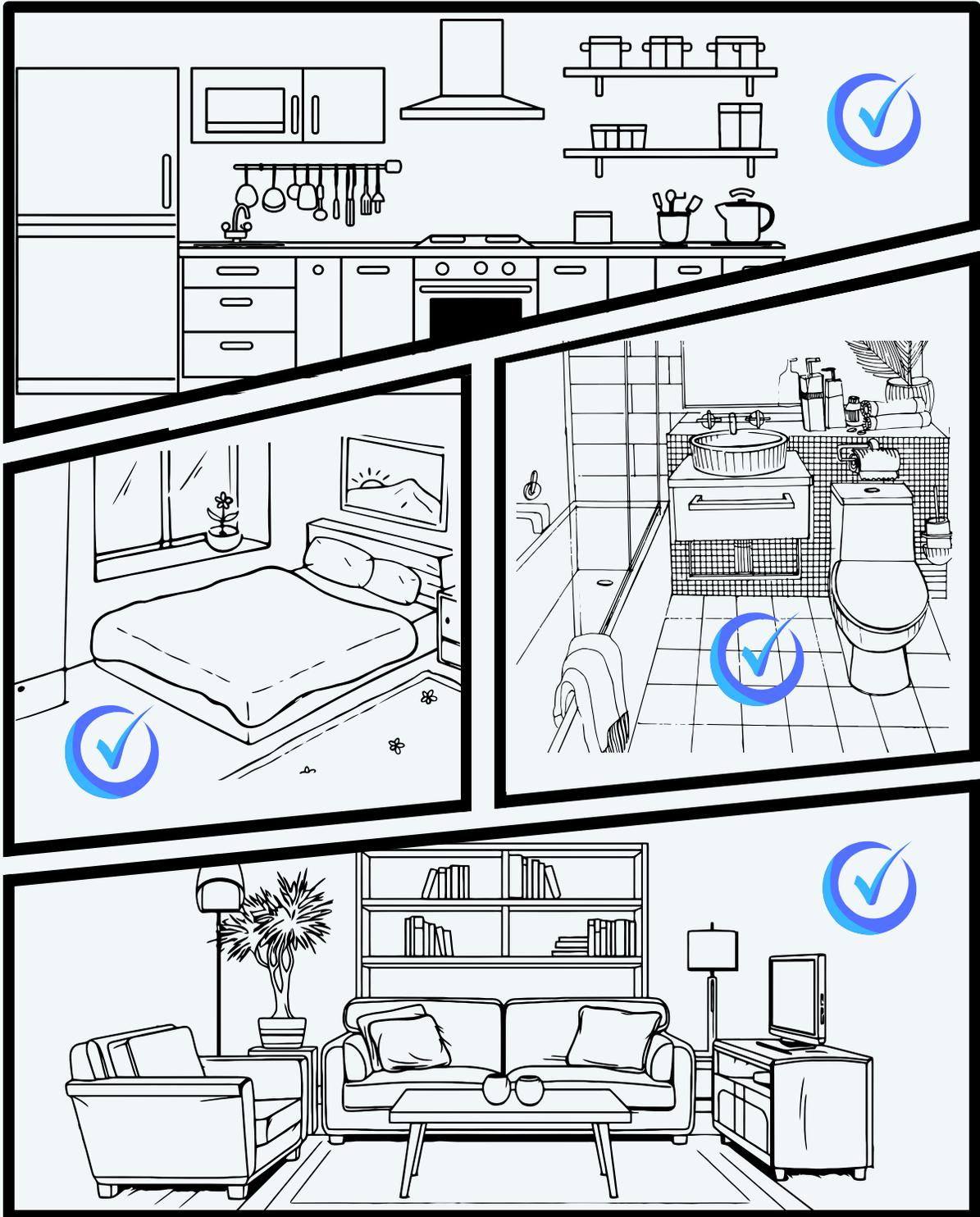


Safe in a crisis



Practical ways to implement lethal means safety measures to support someone in crisis.

2025

DISCLAIMER

This guide is intended for educational and informational purposes only. Its goal is to help individuals and families increase safety by reducing access to potentially lethal means during times of emotional distress or suicidal thoughts.

While research shows that lethal means safety can reduce the risk of suicide, no strategy can eliminate all risk. This guide is not a substitute for professional mental health care, crisis support, or medical advice. If you are concerned about yourself or someone else, please seek help from a licensed professional or contact a crisis line.

Samaritans makes every effort to provide accurate and up-to-date information, but we cannot guarantee outcomes. By using this guide, you acknowledge that Samaritans of New York, Inc. is not liable for any actions taken—or not taken—based on the information provided here.

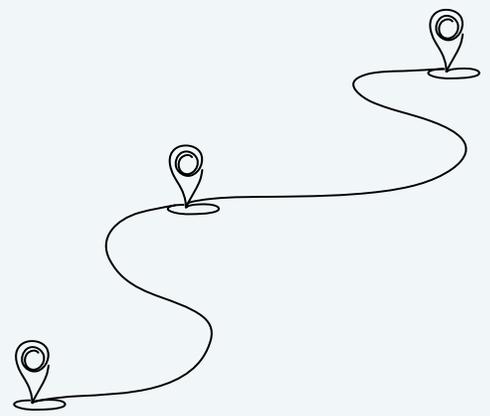
If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, please call 911. If you are in emotional distress or need to talk, contact our 24/7 confidential crisis hotline at 212-673-3000 or call the National Suicide Lifeline, 988.



Page of Contents

3	<i>How to Use This Guide</i>
4	<i>What is Lethal Means Safety</i>
5	<i>How Does it Work?</i>
6	<i>Approaching the Conversation</i>
7	<i>Firearm Safety</i>
12	<i>Medications</i>
16	<i>Sharp Objects (including suicide attempts, non-suicidal self injury and harm reduction)</i>
20	<i>High Places and Jumping Hazards</i>
22	<i>Household Chemicals and Toxic Substances</i>
23	<i>Alcohol and Controlled Substances</i>
26	<i>Ligatures</i>
27	<i>Additional Resources</i>
29	<i>Safety Plan Template</i>
30	<i>References</i>

How to use this guide



Start with what's most dangerous.

Focus first on the items that are most likely to cause serious harm—like guns or large amounts of medications. These methods are often used in suicide attempts and are more likely to be fatal. Locking them up or removing them temporarily can save a life.

Always ask about firearms.

Even if someone doesn't mention a plan, it's important to ask directly if they have access to guns. Firearms are the most lethal means, and asking about them can open the door to a life-saving conversation.

Tailor the plan to the person.

You don't have to remove everything that could possibly be harmful. What matters most is knowing if someone has a specific plan—and focusing safety efforts around that.

Do what's realistic right now.

It may not be possible to make everything 100% safe. That's okay. Even small steps—like locking up pills or asking a friend to hold onto a firearm—can make a big difference.

Think of it as a temporary safety measure.

These changes don't have to be forever. They're just meant to reduce risk during a crisis and create space for things to get better. It's about helping someone stay safe through the toughest moments.

The goal isn't to get rid of everything that could cause harm—just the things that feel most dangerous or are part of a specific plan. We're focused on making things a little safer right now, giving more space between a crisis and a potentially irreversible action.



What is lethal means safety?

Lethal Means

Lethal means are objects or methods that can be used to end a person's life in a suicide attempt. These include firearms, medications, sharp objects, toxic substances, high places, and other potentially deadly tools or environments.

Lethal Means Safety

Lethal means safety refers to actions taken to reduce access to or the deadliness of these methods—especially during times of crisis. The goal is to put time and distance between someone who is suicidal and a potentially fatal method, giving space for the crisis to pass and for support and care to intervene.

Lethal means safety doesn't eliminate pain—it creates the possibility for life beyond it.

How does it work?

Lethal means safety is based on a simple, powerful idea: If we make it harder to access deadly methods during a suicidal crisis, we can save lives.

Key Principles

- **Time and distance matter.** The intensity of suicidal thoughts can lessen over time, and some suicide attempts are impulsive. Creating even a brief delay can help keep someone safe until the moment passes.
- **Reducing access doesn't require the person to seek help.** It protects them during moments when they can't.
- **Lethal means safety doesn't stop suicidal thoughts—it makes those thoughts less deadly.**

1. The experience of suicidal thoughts varies.

For some people, suicidal thoughts come and go over time, while others may feel an intense and sudden urge to act. Lethal means safety protects in both situations—by reducing the chance that someone can act on a suicidal thought in a moment when they are most vulnerable.

2. Most people don't switch to another method.

When a specific lethal method—like a gun or medication—is not available, research shows that most people do not substitute another method. Often, the moment passes without an attempt.

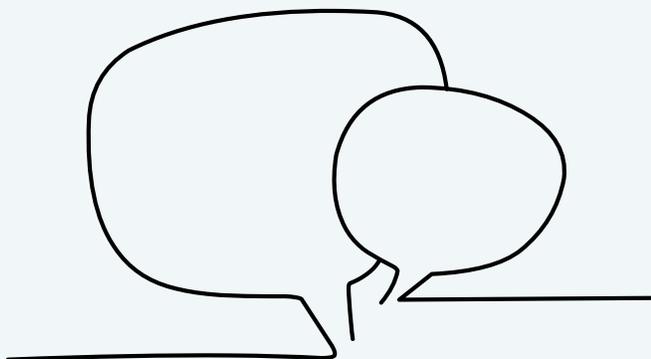
3. If someone does substitute, it's usually a less deadly method.

Firearms are 90% fatal when used in a suicide attempt. All other methods combined are about 5% fatal. That means even if a person attempts using a different method, they're far more likely to survive—and to have a chance to get help.

4. Survival matters.

The vast majority of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide. Lethal means safety gives them the chance to stay alive. It doesn't eliminate the pain, but it increases the chances someone will live through it.

Approaching the Conversation



It's not uncommon for someone to feel frustrated, embarrassed, or even betrayed when a loved one suggests removing or locking up lethal means—especially if they don't consider themselves suicidal or feel their autonomy is being threatened.

But this reaction doesn't mean it's the wrong thing to do.

TIP: You don't need to convince them they're in danger—just agree that extra safety measures can't hurt right now.

1 Acknowledge their feelings.

Let them know you hear them. You don't need to fix their pain or have all the answers—just recognizing what they're going through can help them feel less alone.

2 Focus on your intention: safety, not control.

This isn't about taking away their autonomy—it's about making sure they have the time and support to get through this moment. Framing the conversation around care, not restriction, can help reduce resistance.

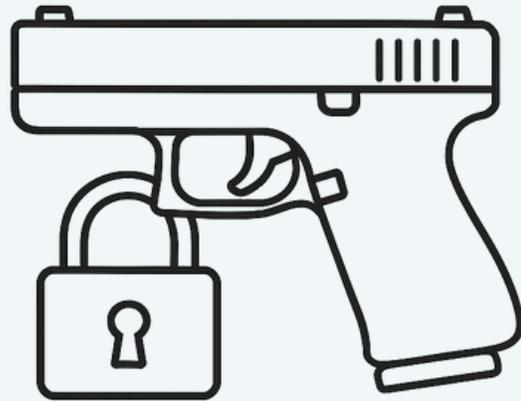
3 Offer a collaborative approach.

Instead of making decisions for them, involve them in the process. Ask what feels manageable, what steps they're comfortable with, and how you can support them in creating a safer environment together.

4 Keep the message simple: This is temporary.

Suicidal thoughts can feel overwhelming, but they don't last forever. Reinforce the idea that safety measures aren't permanent—they're just a way to get through this moment until things feel more manageable.

Firearm Safety



Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide. That's why securing or removing them from the home is one of the most powerful actions you can take to save a life.

✓ Why firearm safety matters

Access to a firearm doesn't make someone suicidal, it makes a suicidal person much more capable of dying.

Each year, more than 2.3 million people—including 1.5 million adults and 856,000 youth—attempt suicide in the U.S.

Most of them survive.

The outcome of a suicide attempt often depends not on how strongly someone wants to die, but, often, on what method they have access to in their most vulnerable moment.

Firearms change the odds.

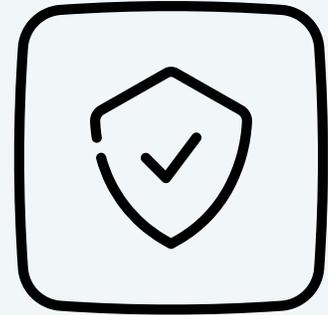
- **Firearms are the most lethal method of suicide.**
- About **90%** of suicide attempts involving a firearm end in death.
- By comparison, **all other methods combined are about 5% fatal.**

That's a massive difference—and one with life-or-death consequences. When someone survives a suicide attempt, they have a chance to get help, reconnect, and recover.

When a firearm is involved, there's rarely that chance.

Safe Storage

When it comes to firearms, safe storage is the key. Even simple steps—like storing guns unloaded, locked, and away from the home during periods of crisis—can make all the difference. Any action that puts time and distance between a person and a gun increases the likelihood that they will survive the moment.



Whenever possible, store guns outside the home.

Removing guns from the home is the safest and most effective way to reduce suicide risk—especially during periods of emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, or major life stressors. This doesn't have to be permanent. It can be a temporary, precautionary step to protect yourself or someone you care about.

Taking this step does not require explaining why to the person or place you're storing with. You can simply say it's for safety or storage reasons.

Safe Off-Site Storage Options

A Trusted Family Member or Friend

- Must be legally permitted to possess firearms (i.e., over 18, not barred due to a felony, restraining order, etc.)
- Should have a way to store firearms securely and away from youth or others in their home
- Choose someone you feel safe with—someone who respects your privacy and intent

Gun Ranges, Clubs, or Gun Shops

- Some offer temporary or low-cost storage—especially if you are a customer or member
- Policies vary, so call first to ask:
 - What documentation is required?
 - Is it secure?
 - How long can they hold it?

Police or Sheriff's Department

- Some departments will store firearms temporarily as a public safety measure
- Call ahead to confirm:
 - Do they accept voluntary storage?
 - How long will they hold them?
 - What is the process to get them back?
 - Are there any fees or background check requirements?
 - Ask about the protocol for bringing in the firearm. For example what should you do when you arrive? Some stations require you to leave the firearm locked in your vehicle until you've checked in and confirmed with the receiving officer.

Pawn Shops

- Pawn shops are a legal, regulated way to temporarily surrender a firearm
- In some states, pawning a firearm for a small loan can serve as an informal storage option
- Be aware of interest rates, loan terms, and the repurchase process
- Be sure to check local laws first

Firearm Safety: In the Home

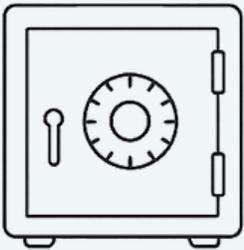
If removing firearms from the home is not an option, there are still critical steps you can take to make their presence as safe as possible, especially during a period of elevated risk.

At a minimum, safe storage means:

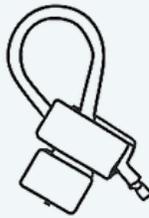
- The firearm is **unloaded**
- It's **locked in a secure place** (like a safe, lockbox, or cabinet)
- **Ammunition is stored separately**, in a different locked location
- **Access is limited**—especially for anyone who may be at risk

These practices reduce the likelihood that someone in crisis can access and use a firearm in a moment of distress.

Safe Storage at Home



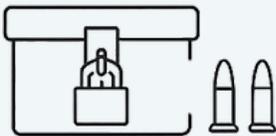
Store in a locked location



Use a gun lock



Store gun unloaded



Lock ammunition in a separate location



Control who has access to safely stored firearms

Safe Storage at Home

✔ Use a Gun Safe or Lockbox

- Choose a sturdy, lockable safe or cabinet
- Use a combination, keypad, or biometric lock
- Avoid storing the key or code in obvious places—give it to a trusted person if needed
- Additional Options:
 - *Smart safes: Fingerprint- or app-based safes can be programmed to limit access to certain users or notify others when opened.*
 - *Time-delay safes: Some models introduce a mandatory delay between opening attempts.*
 - *Dual custody models: Requires two people to unlock the safe.*

✔ Add a Cable Lock or Trigger Lock

- These devices prevent the firearm from being fired, even if someone accesses it
- Many are affordable or available free through police departments or safety programs

✔ Store Ammunition in a Different Locked Spot

- Keep ammo in a separate lockbox or cabinet
- Place it in a different room if possible

✔ Disassemble the Firearm Temporarily (if possible)

- Remove a key part like the firing pin or bolt
- Store that piece outside the home or with a trusted person

✔ Control Who Has Access

- Children should never have access to firearms, keys, or combinations—no matter their age or maturity level.
- Anyone who is struggling or in crisis should not be able to access firearms or ammunition.
- If possible, limit access to a designated friend or loved one—someone you trust to understand the situation and keep the storage secure

Planning for a Return

It's important to be intentional about when and how firearms are returned:

- Make a written or verbal plan with the person or facility storing the gun
- Don't rush to bring firearms back into the home
- Wait until:
 - The person at risk is in a more stable place
 - A mental health professional or loved one agrees the risk has passed
 - You or the person in question feels ready and safe

Returning a gun should never feel automatic—**safety should guide the timeline.**

Firearm Safety FAQ

Do I have to explain why I want to store my gun somewhere else?

No. You can simply say it's for safety or temporary storage.

Will I get it back?

Yes—but ask in advance what the process is. Some places may require ID, paperwork, or a background check to return it.

Isn't this just restricting someone's rights?

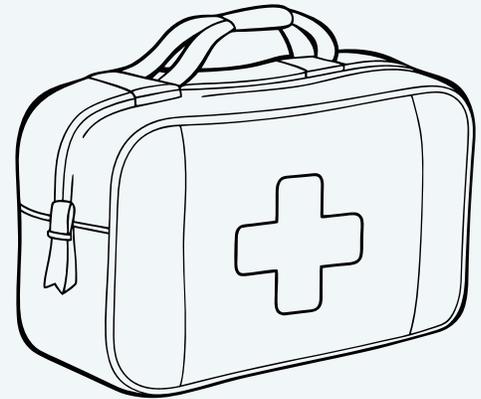
No. Lethal means safety isn't about control—it's about care. It's a temporary step to reduce risk during a vulnerable time. The goal is to protect life and give someone the time and space they need to get through the crisis.

What if they're resistant?

Firearms can carry deep personal meaning—for protection, identity, or as part of a hobby. The suggestion to store firearms off-site can feel like a judgment or accusation, even when it's meant with care. Research shows that when people are involved in making the storage plan, and it's framed as a temporary, safety-first measure, they're more likely to accept it.

Medications

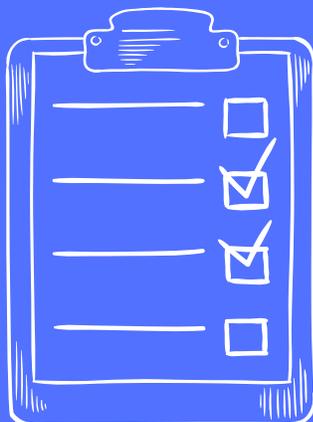
Medications—both prescription and over-the-counter—are among the most common methods used in suicide attempts. They're often easy to access, even unintentionally, and their effects can be serious or fatal.



Taking steps to store, monitor, and manage medications can protect someone in a vulnerable moment—without judgment, and without removing access to needed treatment.

✓ Why Medication Safety Matters

- Medications are everywhere—in purses, kitchen drawers, medicine cabinets, backpacks, and bathroom shelves.
- Many people believe pills are a "gentler" method which can increase the likelihood of use in an attempt.
- Children and teens may misuse medications impulsively or experimentally without understanding the risks.
- Some individuals build up access over time by collecting unused or expired prescriptions.



Overview of Med Safety

- Lock all medications—not just prescriptions
- Dispose of what's expired or not being used
- Talk to your pharmacist about packaging or limiting supply
- Use pill organizers or portioned access
- Keep track of all medications in the home
- Be proactive in shared or visiting spaces

Medication Safety

✓ Lock Up All Medications

- Use a lockbox, locking cabinet, or safe to store:
 - Prescription medications
 - Over-the-counter drugs (ibuprofen, acetaminophen, allergy meds, cold medicine, etc.)
 - Vitamins and supplements (including those for pets)
 - Herbal or natural remedies
- Do not rely on "hiding" medications—secure storage is key.

✓ Dispose of Unused or Expired Medications

- Remove medications that are: expired, no longer needed or prescribed, belong to someone who no longer lives in the home. **Be sure to scratch off and remove any personal or identifying information on prescription packaging.**
- Where to dispose safely:
 - Your local pharmacy or hospital
 - Police or fire stations with disposal drop boxes
 - Community medication take-back events
 - Find your nearest location: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/disposal-unused-medicines-what-you-should-know/drug-disposal-drug-take-back-options>
- If you can't access a disposal site:
 - Mix pills with used coffee grounds or cat litter, seal in a plastic bag, and throw in the trash.
 - ⚠ **Do not flush medications unless the FDA specifically recommends it.**
 - Check FDA guidelines for full instructions and flush list: www.fda.gov/drugs/safe-disposal-medicines

✓ Work With Your Pharmacist or Prescriber

- If someone in your home is at higher risk of suicide—or if you're struggling yourself—talk to your doctor or pharmacist about ways to safely limit access without stopping treatment:
 - Ask if you can receive medications weekly instead of monthly to reduce the amount in your possession at any one time.
 - Request blister packs or unit-dosed packaging, which slows down access to large amounts at once.
 - Discuss whether lower-risk alternatives are available or if certain meds can be temporarily paused or monitored.
- ⚠ **Important: Never stop or reduce medications without medical guidance. The goal is safe access, not discontinuation.**

Medication Safety

✓ Track and Limit Access

- Keep a list of who takes what and how many pills are in each bottle.
- Use pill organizers for daily doses—keep the rest locked up.
- If possible, designate one person to dispense all medications, especially for children, teens, or someone at risk.

✓ Plan for Shared Spaces and Visitors

- If someone at risk will be visiting or staying with you, temporarily lock away all meds—even vitamins.
- If you or someone at-risk spends time somewhere other than your home, ask how they store medications. It's okay to ask:
 - *We've been trying to be more mindful about safety at home around medications, so we've started asking about storage when staying over or hosting—hope that's okay.*
 - *"Do you keep your medications locked up? My child's school suggested we always check."*
 - *"I've started locking up meds at home, just to be safe. Do you do anything like that?"*

✓ Balancing Safety with Autonomy

- Some people may fear that locking up medications is controlling or stigmatizing. You can address this directly:
 - Involve them in the plan. Talk together about where meds are kept and who can access them.
 - Acknowledge their needs and experiences.
 - *"I know these meds help you feel better. I just want to make sure nothing gets in the way of that if a hard moment hits."*
- **Make it about support, not suspicion.**

Medication Safety FAQ

What if locking up medications isn't practical in my home?

You don't need a high-end safe. Many affordable lockboxes or lockable toolboxes work just as well. Even a locked cabinet or closet with a childproof latch and a hidden key can make a difference.

The goal is not perfection—it's progress. Any barrier helps.

Do vitamins, supplements, and "natural" remedies really need to be locked up?

Yes. Some vitamins (like iron) can be toxic in large amounts, especially for children. Sleep aids, herbal remedies, or weight loss supplements may be harmful or misused.

I live with roommates or extended family. What if they won't agree to lock things up?

Living in shared housing can make medication safety more complicated—but that doesn't mean it's impossible. You might not be able to control everything in the household, but you can still take meaningful steps to reduce risk.

Offer practical solutions.

Many people don't resist because they disagree with the idea—they resist because they think it's going to be a hassle. Make it easier by:

- Offering to purchase a shared lockbox or cabinet
- Labeling one cabinet or drawer as a "safe storage zone"
- Suggesting a compromise (e.g., locking only certain meds)

Control what you can.

Even if others won't change their behavior, you can:

- Lock up your medications (prescription or over-the-counter)
- Remove or secure common-use meds you may have purchased (like Tylenol, cold medicine, etc.)
- Keep a personal lockbox in your room or closet

You don't need total control over the environment to make it safer. Even small changes—like locking up your own meds—can be life-saving.

Sharp Objects

Sharp objects are a part of daily life. They're used for cooking, grooming, cleaning, crafting, and caring for ourselves and others. But for people experiencing emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, or engaging in self-harming behaviors, these everyday items can quickly become dangerous.

You don't have to eliminate sharp objects completely—but you can make them harder to access, less dangerous, and more intentional to use.

✓ Why Sharp Object Safety Matters

- Because they are so readily available sharp objects can be used in suicide attempts and are often used for non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI)*.
- Many homes contain multiple sharp items in multiple rooms—often without realizing it.
- Even items that seem harmless or unimportant (like razors or push pins) can be used in harmful ways.

✓ What to Look For and Where

Sharp objects show up in many unexpected places. **Do a thorough sweep of your home**, including bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, garages, art spaces, backpacks, purses, and toolboxes.

Common items to secure or remove include:

- Kitchen knives (paring, chef's knives, steak knives)
- Razors and razor blades (shaving razors, eyebrow razors, box cutters)
- Scissors (craft, grooming, utility)
- Pencil sharpeners with removable blades
- Needles, syringes (including those used for insulin or other injections)
- Safety pins, push pins, thumbtacks, nails, screws, wire
- Craft tools (e.g., X-Acto blades, utility knives)
- Broken items with jagged edges (glass, cracked plastic)

***PLEASE NOTE:** If you or someone you're concerned about is engaging in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) please see pages 20 and 21: *The Risks of Removing ALL Sharp Objects for Someone Who Self-Harms* and *A Better Approach: Safety Through Collaboration*

Sharp Objects Safety

✓ Lock Away When You Can

- **Secure high-risk items like:**
 - Razor blades
 - Box cutters or utility knives
 - X-Acto knives
 - Craft blades
 - Extra or infrequently used kitchen knives
 - Grooming scissors
- Use a lockable box, drawer, or cabinet and store keys out of sight.
- Avoid leaving these items out on counters, in open drawers, or easily accessible containers.
- Even placing items in a locked toolbox or cabinet with a child-proof latch can make a difference.

✓ Remove What Isn't Needed (Temporarily or Permanently)

- If there are tools, craft supplies, or household objects that aren't being used regularly, **consider temporarily removing them from the home.**
- This may include backup razors, duplicate knife sets, or loose hardware.

✓ Modify for Daily Use

- If you need sharp objects in your daily routine (like kitchen knives), you can still make them safer:
 - Use knife guards or blade sheaths to cover sharp edges when stored.
 - Keep kitchen knives in a locked drawer or magnetic wall strip out of reach of at-risk individuals.
 - Opt for rounded-tip knives or smaller knives that are harder to misuse.
 - Switch to electric razors or safety razors with built-in blade guards.
 - Use scissors with blunt or rounded tips for general use or grooming.
 - Swap out sharp grooming tools with plastic alternatives.
- **Focus on reducing the immediacy of access. Delays can be life-saving.**

! The Risks of Removing ALL Sharp Objects for Someone Who Self-Harms

When someone is engaging in **non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI)**—like cutting or scratching—it may feel instinctive to remove all sharp objects from their environment. While that approach comes from a place of care and protection, it can sometimes increase risk rather than reduce it.

What Is NSSI?

Non-suicidal self-injury is not a suicide attempt, though it is often linked to mental health struggles and increased suicide risk over time.

NSSI is an attempt to cope with emotional pain—not an attempt to die.

People who self-injure are often trying to:

- Express or release intense feelings
- Feel something when they're emotionally numb
- Regain control or calm themselves down

Removing tools without addressing the underlying distress can unintentionally make things worse, especially if done without communication or collaboration.

It can increase shame and secrecy

If someone feels they're being punished or controlled, they may:

- Feel more isolated or "broken"
- Hide the behavior, making it harder to notice escalation
- Lose trust in the people trying to help

It doesn't remove the urge—just the tools

Without alternatives, the person may:

- Find riskier or improvised tools (e.g., glass, metal shards)
- Use more dangerous methods or hurt themselves more severely
- Feel even more overwhelmed or out of control

It can escalate emotional and physical risk

Research shows that sudden, total restriction without support can lead to:

- More frequent or harmful injury
- Heightened emotional distress or suicidal thinking
- Avoidance of help-seeking for fear of being "shut down"

**What's a better approach?
Safety through collaborative support and harm reduction.**



A Better Approach: Safety Through Collaboration

When someone you care about is self-harming, it's natural to want to make it stop immediately. But for many people, self-injury is a coping mechanism—not a sign they want to die, but a way to survive overwhelming feelings.

The goal of harm reduction is not to condone self-harm. It's to help someone stay safe while they figure out how to cope in other ways.

Harm reduction is an approach that focuses on keeping people safe and alive—even if they're not ready or able to stop a behavior right away.

Harm Reduction

It recognizes that **change doesn't always happen all at once**, and that people deserve care, dignity, and support no matter where they are in their journey.

Harm reduction asks: *"If someone is going to do this, how can we make it less dangerous, less isolating, and less likely to cause long-term harm?"*

It's not about encouraging risky behavior. **It's about being realistic, staying connected**, and creating a path forward that doesn't rely on shame or punishment.

NSSI Harm Reduction

In the context of self-harm, this might mean:

- Using clean tools to reduce infection
- Avoiding high-risk areas of the body
- Practicing aftercare
- Exploring safer coping methods without demanding immediate abstinence

Harm reduction isn't the end goal—it's a bridge between pain and healing.

High Places and Jumping Hazards

While less commonly discussed, access to high places—like windows, balconies, rooftops, or stairwells—can pose a serious risk, especially during a suicidal crisis. For individuals who are experiencing intense emotional distress, these locations can become places of impulsive action.

Restricting access doesn't mean turning your home into a fortress—it means removing the option during a dangerous moment, when a person may be overwhelmed, disconnected, or acting on a sudden impulse.

✓ Why It Matters

- The decision to jump is often made in a moment of intense emotional pain—with very little time between thought and action. **Once the action is taken, there's no opportunity to change course.**
- Creating even small barriers or delays can disrupt that moment and allow time for the crisis to pass.

✓ Safety Measures Inside the Home

- **Windows**
 - Install window locks or window guards to prevent wide openings
 - Use limiters to restrict how far windows can be opened
 - Rearrange furniture to make windows less accessible (move beds, desks, chairs away)
 - Lock high-level windows, especially during periods of high risk
- **Balconies, Fire Escapes & Ledges**
 - Lock or block access to balconies or fire escapes when not in active use
 - Install childproof latches on balcony doors
 - Add barriers or railings that reduce the ability to climb or lean over
 - If roof access is present, ensure it's locked and supervised
- **Stairs & High Drop-Offs**
 - Use gates at stairwells if a child, teen, or at-risk adult lives in the home
 - Avoid leaving doors to attics, rooftops, or garages propped open
 - Be mindful of multi-level homes where ledges or lofts create fall risks

High Places and Jumping: Hazards Safety Measures Outside the Home

For some individuals, the method and specific location become part of the thought process. In moments of intense distress or emotional shutdown, these locations can become associated with escape or relief. When that happens, removing access entirely may not be possible—but there are still steps you can take to reduce risk, interrupt patterns, and stay connected.

✓ **Public Locations: Bridges, Subways, Train Tracks & Other Sites**

- **Change the Routine**
 - Avoid that location whenever possible
 - Take alternate routes to work or school, even if they're slightly longer
 - Use a different train station or get off at a different stop
 - If they typically walk or commute alone, consider:
 - Carpooling
 - Traveling with a buddy
 - Switching to public transit if they usually drive past a triggering location (or vice versa)
- **Offer Presence, Not Surveillance**
 - Ask if they'd feel safer commuting with someone
 - Frame it as care, not control:
 - *"If this route's been hard lately, let's figure out another way together. I don't want you to have to face that alone."*
- **Collaborate on a Safety Strategy**
 - If a location is regularly encountered (like a subway platform), come up with things to do if the urge surfaces:
 - Call someone
 - Text a grounding word
 - Sit on a bench or move to another platform
 - Get off and take the next train
 - If you're near a high-risk location or feeling overwhelmed while commuting, one simple but powerful tool is your phone.
 - Watch or listen to something comforting—a favorite show, podcast, playlist, or voice message from someone you trust.
 - Focusing on something familiar and soothing can:
 - Help ground you in the present moment
 - Interrupt spiraling thoughts
 - Remind you that you're connected and cared for

Household Chemicals and Toxic Substances



✓ Why It Matters

- Household chemicals are not always recognized as lethal means, but many are fatal or permanently harmful when ingested or inhaled.
- Poisoning attempts often involve substances that are readily available and easy to access in the moment.

✓ Secure high-risk items

- Bleach
- Ammonia-based cleaners
- Drain cleaners
- Pesticides and insecticides
- Paint thinners or solvents
- Automotive fluids (antifreeze, motor oil, etc.)
- Laundry pods and concentrated detergents

✓ How To Store safely

- Use a lockable box, cabinet, or storage bin
- Keep keys or codes out of sight and out of reach
- Don't store toxic products in easily opened drawers or under sinks
- Avoid storing chemicals in shared or visible spaces like garages, laundry rooms, or hallways

✓ When possible, choose safer alternatives

- Use non-toxic or plant-based cleaning products
- Avoid repurposing chemical containers
- Clearly label all household substances

Alcohol and Controlled Substances

Alcohol and controlled substances significantly increase suicide risk—both by impairing judgment and sometimes being the method used.

- As many as **50%** of suicide deaths involve alcohol or drug use at the time of death.
- People with alcohol use disorder are up to **10x more likely** to die by suicide.
- Substance overdose is one of the most common methods of suicide.

These substances reduce a person’s ability to think clearly or seek help in time and can intensify emotional pain in moments of crisis.

Please note: This information is provided for harm reduction, education and public safety purposes only. We do not condone or encourage illegal activity.

Step 1: Remove What You Can

Safest Option:

If possible, **remove alcohol, cannabis, and other substances from the home** during periods of elevated risk.

What to remove

- Bottles of wine, liquor, or spirits
- Edibles, cannabis products, and THC vapes
- Other controlled substances
- Paraphernalia that may trigger use or carry emotional associations (pipes, grinders, bongs, etc.)

Safe Storage

If you’re not ready to remove items completely, you can still take steps to store them safely and out of reach to reduce risk.

Note: Cannabis safety recommendations apply only if cannabis is legal where you live. Always follow local laws regarding possession and storage.

- **Store items out of sight** – Put away wine and beer glasses, corkscrews, and other drinking cues that may serve as emotional triggers.
- **Lock up paraphernalia** – This includes pipes, bongs, vapes, grinders, rolling papers, or other accessories.
- **Secure alcohol and cannabis** – Place them in a locked cabinet, toolbox, or storage bin. Avoid leaving them in common areas like the kitchen or bathroom.
- **Ask someone you trust** – A friend or family member may be willing to temporarily hold on to items during a high-risk period. This can be short-term and doesn’t require a long explanation.

Alcohol and Controlled Substances

Use Local Take-Back Resources

- Harm reduction programs may accept controlled substances or paraphernalia (often anonymously)
- Municipal sanitation departments may allow small alcohol or cannabis disposal under specific conditions
- Visit: NextDistro.org – for mail-back and local options
- Your city’s sanitation site (search for “household hazardous waste” or “alcohol disposal”)

If a take back program is not available and/or there are no other specific instructions for the substance you are disposing of the FDA recommends the following:

- **Remove** the drugs from their original containers.
- **Mix** with an unappealing substance such as dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds. Do not crush tablets or capsules.
- Place the mixture in a **sealed container** such as a sealed plastic bag.
- **Throw away** the sealed container in your **trash at home**.

Additional Steps You Can Take

If opioids are used in your household—whether prescribed, misused, or present in your community—having naloxone available is a powerful way to reduce harm.

- Naloxone (often known by the brand name Narcan) is a medication that reverses opioid overdoses
- It’s available without a prescription in many states
- You can get it at most pharmacies, harm reduction programs, or by mail
- It’s easy to use—most kits include a nasal spray and step-by-step instructions.

Having naloxone doesn’t encourage drug use—it’s a lifesaving tool, just like a seatbelt or fire extinguisher.

Alcohol and Controlled Substances

If You or Someone You Love Is Struggling

Addiction is not a failure—it’s a health condition that deserves care, not shame. Whether it’s alcohol, cannabis, opioids, or other substances, help is available.

- **You are not alone.** Recovery is possible at any stage.
- Support groups like **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** or **Narcotics Anonymous (NA)** can be a starting point.

There are also alternatives to 12-step programs available including:

- **SMART Recovery** (a self-empowered, science-based alternative to 12-step programs),
- as well as **peer-led recovery groups, faith-based programs, and culturally specific supports** designed for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, LGBTQ+, immigrant, and other marginalized communities.

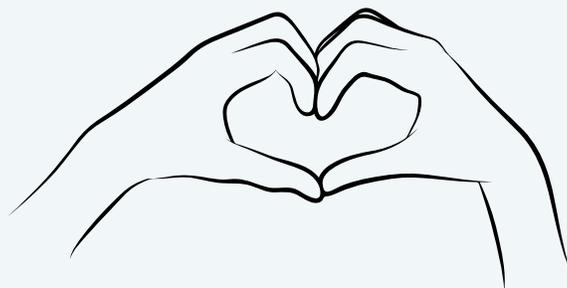
These programs often offer more accessible, affirming, or culturally grounded approaches to healing and recovery.

Treatment & Harm Reduction

- [SAMHSA Treatment Locator](#) – Find local mental health and substance use services
- [HarmReduction.org](#) – Tools, strategies, and education rooted in respect and dignity

Peer Support & Recovery Groups

- [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#) – 12-step support for alcohol recovery
- [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#) – 12-step support for drug recovery
- [SMART Recovery](#) – Science-based self-empowered recovery model



Ligatures

Items that can be used as ligatures—materials that can tighten around the neck or restrict breathing—may pose serious risks, especially when left in easily accessible places. By making small changes in the home environment, you can reduce the likelihood of impulsive actions and help protect the people you care about.

Common Ligature Risks

Objects that can be used to restrict airflow or circulation include:

- Belts
- Ropes and cords
- Scarves
- Dog leashes
- Long charging cables
- Curtain and window blind cords
- Drawstrings (from clothing, bags, etc.)
- Shoelaces
- Bungee cords
- Plastic bags or dry cleaning film

Remove, Replace, Manage

Rather than aiming for total elimination, experts recommend a practical harm reduction approach. Drawing on guidance from the Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Ligature Risk Reduction Policy (2019), a helpful framework is:

Remove, Replace, Manage

- **Remove** unnecessary items that pose a high risk.
- **Replace** certain materials (e.g., long cords) with safer alternatives.
- **Manage** what remains by staying aware, making adjustments, and revisiting safety plans—especially during times of increased vulnerability.

Practical Safety Tips

- Store high-risk items like belts and cords out of sight and in hard-to-access places.
- Use cord organizers to shorten long cables or chargers.
- Install breakaway curtain or blind cords, which are designed to detach under pressure.
- Tie up or cut down window blind cords or consider switching to cordless options.
- Replace drawstring items with zippered or elastic alternatives when feasible.
- Regularly reassess bedrooms, bathrooms, and shared spaces—especially if someone in the household is navigating a mental health crisis or high-stress period.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Understanding Suicide

A basic review of the incidence of suicide, warning signs, risk & protective factors, Samaritans 5 C's for crisis communication & a simple suicide assessment. <https://bit.ly/4jUDmVE>

Myths & Misconceptions

This handout challenges common misunderstandings about suicide, emphasizing the importance of compassion, awareness, and proactive support in addressing suicidal thoughts and behaviors. <https://bit.ly/Myths-Misconceptions>

Learn the Signs

The majority of people who attempt suicide do something or say something to let others know, before they act. Learning the warning signs, risk and protective factors for suicide can help you recognize if you or someone you care about needs support. <https://bit.ly/Learn-the-Signs>

Samaritans' Safety Plan Template

Samaritans has created the Safety Plan template utilizing the current standards and best practices Safety planning is a personalized, prioritized 6-step, guide designed to help reduce self-harm and suicidal behaviors. <https://bit.ly/SAMS-Safety-Plan>

Emotional Communication Toolkit for Kids

This Toolkit for Kids is designed to help children express their feelings and needs in a supportive way. Through interactive worksheets, kids can explore emotions like sadness, fear, appreciation, and love, while learning how to communicate these feelings effectively. <https://bit.ly/Mental-Health-Worksheets-for-Kids>

Mental Health + Suicide Prevention Mobile Apps

This list of free, mental health mobile applications includes descriptions and features. All apps on this list have been pre-screened and offer interactive, digital mental health support. <https://bit.ly/Mental-Health-Suicide-Prevention-Mobile-Apps-2025>



SAMARITANS' RESOURCE HUB

Discover the Samaritans' Resource Hub, This online platform offers a wealth of mental health and suicide prevention resources. The Resource Hub is organized into sections tailored to specific populations, situations, and environments. Whether you're a mental health professional, looking for support for yourself, or helping a loved one, Samaritans' has got you covered!



Visit the Resource Hub



SAMARITANS' SUPPORT SERVICES

24-HOUR SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE

212-673-3000

NYC's only **completely confidential** 24-hour crisis response service provides free, immediately accessible emotional support from a caring and professionally trained hotline volunteer 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To learn more, go to: <https://samaritansnyc.org/get-support-2/>

WELLNESS SUPPORT LINE

212-673-3661

[SCHEDULE A CALL TODAY](#)

Samaritans free mental health wellness line allows people to plan ahead and schedule a supportive call at their convenience, instead of waiting until they are experiencing a crisis.

To learn more, go to: samaritansnyc.org/get-support-2/

SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVOR SUPPORT

Samaritans Safe Place support groups for those who have lost a love one to suicide that provide a safe and supportive environment to help those bereaved by suicide to cope with their loss in the company of others who have had the same experience.

To learn more, go to: samaritansnyc.org/get-support-2/

MY SAFETY PLAN

Safety planning is a personalized, prioritized 6-step, guide designed to help reduce self-harm and suicidal behaviors.

The plan is created collaboratively with the person in distress to help them stay safe during a crisis.

The plan should be clear and concise, easy for the person in crisis to access and follow. It should be written in their own handwriting and their own words.

Samaritans has created the following Safety Plan template utilizing the current standards and best practices.

For a step-by-step guide on how to create + implement a safety plan, go to: <https://bit.ly/SPRC-SPguide>

Keys to Safety Planning:

- **Plan Ahead.** Create your plan before a crisis
- **Be Realistic.** Select strategies that you are likely to use (e.g. if you tend to be in crisis at 3am, then going for a run might not be possible.)
- **Make it work for you.** Keep a copy of your plan on you (a picture on your phone, a copy in your wallet, etc.)

Learn more at: samaritansnyc.org

1

Warning Signs

When I notice these thoughts, feelings or behaviors I should use my safety plan.

2

Coping Strategies

Things I can do on my own that help me feel better: watch tv, listen to music, read, exercise, journal, etc.

3

Distraction

People I can call and places I go to take my mind of things.

	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

4

Supportive family + friends

People I trust who I can reach out to for help.

	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

5

Professional Services

Samaritans Crisis Hotline: 212-673-3000
 988 National Suicide Crisis Lifeline: Dial 988
 Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

My Local Emergency Room:

Other:

6

Steps I can take to make my environment safer and limit my access to lethal means.

References

- Ahmedani, B. K., Betz, M. E., & Boudreaux, E. D. (2025). Evaluating the effect of routine lethal means counseling in the emergency department. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, forthcoming.
- Barber, C. W., & Miller, M. J. (2014). Reducing a suicidal person's access to lethal means of suicide: A research agenda. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 47(3 Suppl 2), S264–S272.
- Betz, M. E., Knoepke, C. E., Siry, B., Clement, A., Azrael, D., Ernestus, S., & Matlock, D. D. (2019). "Lock to Live": Development of a firearm storage decision aid to enhance lethal means counselling and prevent suicide. *Injury Prevention*, 25(Suppl 1), i18–i24.
- Chen, T., Hemenway, D., & Miller, M. (2023). Combining case definitions in matched case-control studies: Firearms in the home and suicide risk. *arXiv Preprint*.
- Gillespie, G. L., et al. (2024). Preventing suicide through lethal means restriction in pediatric settings. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 38(2), 125–133.
- Johnson, R. M., Frank, E. M., Ciocca, M., & Barber, C. W. (2011). Training mental healthcare providers to reduce at-risk patients' access to lethal means of suicide: Evaluation of the CALM project. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 15(3), 259–264.
- Knapp, S. L. (2023). Lethal means counseling for suicidal firearm owners. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 53, 279–287.
- Mann, J. J., & Michel, C. A. (2016). Prevention of firearm suicide in the United States: What works and what is possible. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 173(10), 969–979.
- Means Matter Project, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2025).
- Moran, G., Holliday, R., Simonetti, J. A., Brenner, L. A., & Monteith, L. L. (2020). Firearm-related experiences and perceptions among United States male veterans: A qualitative interview study. *PLOS ONE*, 15(3), e0230135.
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. (2019). *Ligature risk reduction policy (Version 4)*.
- Paashaus, L., Forkmann, T., Glaesmer, H., Juckel, G., Rath, D., Schönfelder, A., & Teismann, T. (2021). From decision to action: Suicidal history and time between decision to die and actual suicide attempt. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 28(6), 1427–1434.
- Runyan, C. W., Brooks-Russell, A., Tung, G., Brandspigel, S., Betz, M. E., Novins, D. K., & Miller, M. (2018). Hospital emergency department lethal means counseling for suicidal patients. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 54(2), 259–265.
- Simonetti, J. A., Wortzel, H. S., & Matarazzo, B. B. (2021). Therapeutic risk management and firearm-related lethal means safety. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 27(6), 456–465.
- Siry, B., Polzer, E., Omeragic, F., Knoepke, C. E., Matlock, D. D., & Betz, M. E. (2022). Stakeholder perceptions of lethal means safety counseling. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, Article 993415.
- Stanley, I. H., Hom, M. A., Sachs-Ericsson, N. J., Gallyer, A., & Joiner, T. E. (2020). A pilot randomized clinical trial of a lethal means safety intervention for young adults with firearm familiarity at risk for suicide. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 88(4), 372–383.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023). CALM: Counseling on access to lethal means. Suicide Prevention Resource Center. <https://sprc.org/online-training/calm-counseling-on-access-to-lethal-means/>
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. (n.d.). Controlled substance public disposal locations – search utility.
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. (n.d.). National Prescription Drug Take Back Day.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2022, February). Disposal of unused medicines: What you should know.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2023, February 2). FDA flush list for certain medicines.
- Yip, P. S. F., Caine, E., Yousuf, S., Chang, S. S., Wu, K. C. C., & Chen, Y. Y. (2012). Means restriction for suicide prevention. *The Lancet*, 379(9834), 2393–2399.