

GUN SAFETY FOR GUN OWNERS

Safety is the most important issue regarding gun ownership, possession and use. A gun accident can happen in a fraction of a second, and may result in a tragic injury or death. Safe handling of guns can reduce gun accidents. Safe gun handling can be learned and incorporated into gun handling and shooting procedures. Gun safety rules must always be practiced, there is never an exception.

Adults who own a gun should learn and practice gun safety every time you handle a gun: in your home to store it, clean it, or put it into a case to take to the range, in a vehicle to transport a gun to the range or hunting area, and when shooting at a range or when hunting.

a. Learn gun safety rules

There are many rules for safe gun handling. Two very important gun safety rules are:

- (1) Always control the direction of the muzzle and point it in a safe direction.
- (2) Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.

Always control the direction of the muzzle means that whenever you pick up, put down, shoot, clean, store, transport, or touch a gun in any way, make sure the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction. A safe direction is any direction away from people and animals and away from any object you don't want to shoot. At a range it is down range or towards the berm or backstop. At home it means away from walls, ceilings, or floors that are between you and other people. A safe direction always depends on where you are and where other people are. If you don't know, or aren't sure, where other people are, assume people will be in places that people normally are or might be. For example, if there is a building in sight, assume people are in it; if there is a wooded area, assume people are hiking in it. You need to check safe directions before handling a gun. The reason for this rule is, if the gun goes off accidentally it is less likely to hurt anyone if it is pointed in a safe direction.

Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot means just that. Don't put your finger on the trigger, or even into the trigger guard, as you pick up a gun. Keep your finger out straight along the frame of the gun. When you are on the firing line at a shooting range, in your shooting stance and have the gun up pointed at the target, then you can put your finger on the trigger. If you aren't ready to shoot a target at a shooting range or ready to shoot while hunting, you have no reason to have your finger on the trigger. The reason for this rule is, if you don't have your finger on the trigger, the gun is not likely to go off accidentally.

There are many other rules for safe gun handling and they can be found in hunter safety, gun and shooting books and pamphlets. They are all important and should be followed.

The range where you practice will also have some of its own safety rules. You must read and observe all of these. Gun safety saves lives and accidental shootings. Gun safety is the responsibility of every person who owns, possesses or uses a gun.

Gun Safety Rules

These are not all the rules that should be followed to be safe with a gun. They are, however, many of the basic rules. Add to this list when you find new rules in other books and material. Keep incorporating into your safe gun handling practice new gun safety rules as you learn them.

Always control the direction of the muzzle, and keep it pointed in a safe direction away from any person, animal, thing or direction you don't want to shoot.

Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.

Treat all gun as though they are loaded.

Keep the gun's safety on until you are ready to shoot.

Keep guns unloaded when you aren't using them.

Lock guns and ammunition away from children and careless adults.

Never point a gun at anything that you do not intend to shoot.

Never treat guns as toys.

Don't use alcohol or drugs (including non-prescription drugs) when you are using a gun.

Never pull a gun toward you by the muzzle.

Range safety rules

Always keep the muzzle pointed down range.

Always wear eye and ear protection.

Obey all posted range rules.

Leave the action open when you put your gun down for any reason.

Don't handle your gun or any of your equipment when the range is cold or when anyone is downrange changing targets.

If you need to clear a malfunction, turn your body, not your gun, so you can keep the muzzle downrange at all times.

Immediately follow all commands of the range officer.

Avoid talking on the firing line, so everyone can hear the range officer.

Carry guns to and from the range in a carrying case.

Only take ammunition for the gun you are using.

Know how to safely decock your gun.

Practice with an experienced and knowledgeable shooter for safety and coaching.

Never step or reach in front of the firing line to pick up your empty cases if the line is hot (people are still shooting).

Make sure the barrel and action of your gun are clean and free from any obstructions.

b. Read the gun's manual

New guns come with a manual. Thoroughly read the manual for each gun you own or are going to shoot. They contain safety information about the particular gun you have. There usually is some information about the safety features and mechanisms on the particular gun the manual is describing. Pay particular attention to this because some models have special safety features that you will need to know about. Knowing, and using, the safety features of the gun you have is as important as the general safety rules.

c. Take courses

Take as many shooting courses as you can. Each course you take will reinforce the general safety rules and will give you an opportunity to practice them under supervision. Courses will also let you practice different shooting techniques and styles and let you see

how the safety rules are integrated into each. The more you shoot, the safer you should become.

Consider taking a hunter safety class, even if you aren't a hunter. These classes generally provide good information about gun safety, gun handling, gun laws and how guns work. In addition you will likely learn interesting things about the environment, ecology, wildlife and other topics.

d. Practice

Practice shooting whenever you can. The more you handle your gun, load and unload it, and shoot it, the more comfortable you will be with it and the safer you will become. If you leave your gun in a case from one year to the next, you won't be familiar with it and its safety devices the next time you take it out of the case. If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about handling the gun, you won't be as safe with it. If it has been a long time since you handled your gun, take it in its case to a course or gun club and get some more instruction and help with handling it.

e. Join a gun club

Gun clubs generally stress safety. They are a great place for you to practice shooting in a safe place with people who appreciate your gun-safety attitude. Before you join a gun club attend one or more meetings, visit their gun range and notice how they practice and enforce gun safety and talk to members of the club to learn their attitudes about gun safety. If the club practices good gun safety, join it.

Joining a gun club can give you the opportunity to make shooting a hobby, let you meet other people with a common interest and can lead you to opportunities for competition if you like to compete.

f. Teach your family gun safety

Teach gun safety to everyone living in your home. The rules will be different for other adults who may use the gun from time to time and for children, who should never handle a gun without adult training and supervision.

Teach your children gun safety rules and that they should never handle a gun, no matter where or when they see one, but they should always tell a trusted adult about seeing a gun. Talk to your children about the dangers of guns and how they can be safe.