

# FIREARMS - ADVICE FOR PRACTITIONERS



## FIREARMS IN ESSEX

Owning a shotgun/firearm in the UK is a privilege and not a right. The overwhelming number of people in UK who legally own shotguns and firearms are law abiding citizen. Firearms control in Great Britain is among the toughest in the world and, as a result firearms offences continue to make up a small proportion of recorded crime. Some firearms and shot guns may be held on a firearm or shot gun certificate issued by the police, who are the licencing authority. Certificate (license) to possess, purchase or acquire a firearm will only be granted to an individual who is assessed by the licensing authority, the police, as not posing a threat to public safety and having good reason to own the firearm.

In-depth background checks and continuous monitoring of certificate holders behaviour is conducted by police to ensure this remains the case. This ensures that the instances of a legally held shotgun or firearms being misused remains very low.

In Essex, there are many legally held shotguns and firearms and certificates are valid for 5 years and the holder must apply to renew a licence before the expiry date. This will mean that practitioners could find themselves working with a family or coming into contact with an individual who is issued with a firearms licence. By law, these should always be kept in a locked secured gun cabinet. Air rifles can be legally owned without a license/certificate and do not need to be secured in a locked gun cabinet.

### KEY ASPECTS OF UK FIREARMS LEGISLATION - NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## WHAT TO DO IF THERE ARE ADULTS WITH DETERIORATING MENTAL HEALTH OR CHILDREN IN THE HOUSEHOLD

If a key worker visits a home and is aware of the presence of firearms and children, they should:

1. Report any unsecure firearm to the police.
2. Check with the Police if there should be a licence, and if there should, that one is in place and current.
3. Is the firearm are locked/secure?
4. Does the person, family, other professional have any concerns or require any support to maintain the firearms safety.
5. Consider the risk to the person, household and public and discuss with their line manager any concern. Any remaining concern should be reported to the Police.

# DIGITAL FIREARMS MARKER

The BMA guidance is a result of a two-year consultation process and considers the recently published Home Office statutory guidance for chief officers of police on firearms licensing that came into effect on 1 November 2021.

The BMA are in support of the firearms flagging process. GPs are now asked to provide medical information if a firearms applicant has a history of relevant mental or physical conditions, and to alert the authorities if their patients develop a medical condition that could affect their ability to hold a firearms licence after it has been issued. However, Police officers and not GPs are legally liable for judging whether someone is able to possess a firearm, and for checking medical records of applicants.

To support firearms flagging, a digital firearms marker developed by NHS Digital in partnership with the DHSC, Home Office, BMA, RCGP and other key stakeholders is now live on SystmOne, EMIS and Cegedim IT systems. GPs are not required to go through historic records and add the marker to patients who already hold a firearms license.

However, **the marker must be applied to a patient's record via a SNOMED\* code**, when a GP receives notification for an application of a firearms certificate, or when a certificate is granted. The marker will then automatically trigger an alert if a condition that is listed in a 'digital firearms licence reference set' is added to that patient's record, or when the marker is added to the record and the patient already has one of the conditions.

The condition set used by the marker is 'highly sensitive', which means an alert will not always warrant a report to the police. If an alert is triggered, GPs should review the patient record. Where a GP feels it does not warrant a report to the police they should 'record that they have reviewed the record using the appropriate code, and record that no action is required on clinical grounds'.

The wider legal duty to protect the health of patients and the public is one reason why doctors may need to provide confidential information about their patients to the police

even without their consent. Where an alert does warrant a report to the police, the medical records should be annotated (using a code from the FTCSRS) to indicate that the police have been informed, or that the patient has been asked to inform the police.

If there is a public safety concern, or if the GP believes that the patient has not or will not inform the police, then the GP should contact the local police firearms branch themselves (or telephone 101) to report the new diagnosis. They should inform the patient that they (the GP) will be doing this.

Where a new condition of concern is added to the records of someone with an existing licence or with an application in progress, the GP should contact the patient to advise them that they must contact the police to update them with the new information.

There are possible occasions when the marker may not be triggered depending on how a particular condition is added to a patient's records. System suppliers will have guidance on how to run searches to identify such patients. Full information on the marker along with the 'trigger reference set' are on NHS Digital's website.

\* SNOMED - Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine Clinical Terms





## DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS?

It is important that any concerns around mental health, regarding a person known or considered to have access to Firearms, are communicated to the Police as a matter of priority to highlight the risk and allow additional checks to be conducted. You may be saving that persons life or protecting someone else.

## WHO DO I REPORT CONCERNS TO?



Should you see/observe a shotgun/firearm unsecured you must inform the police on the non-emergency number 101.



If the person you are attending to makes any reference to using the firearm, ring 999.



Some air rifles and air pistols can look very realistic and easily mistaken for a viable firearm. If you observe an unsecured gun/firearm and are unsure if it is a licenced weapon or not, report this to police on 101.



If you need to know if someone is a licence holder or firearms are registered at an address, you can make an enquiry to Essex Police's Firearms Licensing team [firearms@essex.police.uk](mailto:firearms@essex.police.uk).



## TRAINING ON FIREARMS



An e-learning module has been created to provide Practitioners with support around Firearms and Mental Health.

To access the training please use <https://learning.safeguardingsouthend.co.uk/course/firearms/>

## IF YOU REPORT BE CLEAR WHY?

- Are you reporting because you think **the way the firearms is stored is inappropriate**, or
- Are you reporting because you think that **someone may make poor decisions about the use and storage of the firearm?**

