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String of accidental shooting deaths of young children in Colorado highlight importance of secure gun storage

Parents in Frederick charged this week after sibling accidentally shot and killed 3-year-old girl

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The parents of a 3-year-old girl accidentally shot to death by a sibling in Frederick on Mother's Day were criminally charged this week in connection with what was the third accidental gunshot death of a child along the Front Range in less than a month.

The Frederick shooting and the recent accidental self-inflicted shooting deaths of children in Denver and Fort Collins highlight the critical need for proper gun storage, safety advocates say.

Brett Eskam, an Adams County sheriff's sergeant, and his wife Elaine Eskam each have been charged with six counts of unlawful storage of a firearm, a class 2 misdemeanor, the Weld County District Attorney's Office announced Thursday.

The Adams County Sheriff's Office confirmed Brett Eskam has been placed on leave.

Officers from the Frederick Police Department responded around 10:45 a.m. May 8 to a [shooting inside a home on Second Street](#). Responders found 3-year-old Avery Elaine Eskam suffering from life-threatening injuries. She was taken to a hospital and later pronounced dead.

Investigators discovered that a young sibling in the home got ahold of a gun and accidentally shot the 3-year-old, said Krista Henery, a spokeswoman for the Weld County District Attorney's Office. Henery said she did not know the age of the sibling.

The girl's death marked the third fatal accidental shooting of a young child along the Front Range since April. In each case, the parents were arrested, though prosecutors ultimately declined to file charges in one of the deaths.

Eileen McCarron, the president of legislative action for Colorado Ceasefire, a grassroots gun-violence prevention organization, said proper gun storage can not only save lives, it's also legally required. After the [passage of the Safe Storage Bill last year](#), Colorado gun owners must keep firearms locked whenever the weapons are not in immediate reach of the owner.

"We're not talking about a huge amount of money here. It's less than the cost of the gun," McCarron said. "The thing is, it's saving lives that are precious."

McCarron said ammunition and firearms should be stored separately, with appropriate locks to keep guns away from children and those not allowed to own firearms, such as felons. No one, other than the owner, McCarron said, should know the code to the safe or know where the keys are.

Parents should also consider checking with other families before sending their children into another home, to make sure any guns are stored safely, McCarron said.

The first in the recent spate of child firearm deaths occurred April 10, when 6-year-old Roy Summers died [after an accidental self-inflicted shooting](#) in Fort Collins. Authorities responded to a call just before 6:30 p.m. saying that a child in a home in the 1200 block of East Lincoln Avenue had shot himself, police said in a news release. Police and emergency responders found the child with injuries consistent with a gunshot wound and transported him to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Following an investigation, Fort Collins police learned that the boy's mother, Rosinetta Mackall, 40, had taken the handgun that the 6-year-old shot himself with out earlier in the day. She is accused of leaving the unsecured weapon in an area her children had frequent access to, police said.

Summers is believed to have grabbed the gun and accidentally shot himself hours afterward, police said.

Ron Matthews, Mackall's husband, was not present at the home or living there at the time of the accident, but police alleged Matthews "lied and tampered with evidence of

their conversation” when he was questioned about his interactions with Mackall surrounding the incident.

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Mackall has been charged with felony child abuse and misdemeanor unlawful storage of a firearm and Matthews has been charged with felony attempt to influence a public servant and misdemeanor tampering with physical evidence. They turned themselves in to authorities on April 25.

Another child, a 3-year-old boy, was also [killed by an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound](#) in Denver last month.

The child was brought to a hospital in a private vehicle around 5:20 p.m. on April 17 with a gunshot wound and died five days later on April 22.

The shooting happened in a parked car in the 1700 block of South Pecos Street, police said.

Arrest warrants were issued for the parents, Celina Duran, 39, and Manuel Lopez, 34, on suspicion of child abuse – negligently causing death, according to a police news release.

The Denver District Attorney’s Office, however, concluded there was not enough evidence to successfully prosecute the parents, and declined to file charges, spokeswoman Carolyn Tyler confirmed Thursday.

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