

TOP 50 QUESTIONS NEW GUN OWNERS ASK

A Zero-Intimidation Beginner's Field Guide to Safety, Maryland Legal Compliance, First Handgun Selection & Range Fundamentals

A Personal Note from Lead Instructor Kai Wade:

Walking into a gun store or a firing range for the first time can feel intimidating. Between complex state laws, tactical jargon, and loud range environments, many new shooters hesitate to ask the questions they care about most. At Future Initiative Firearm Services (FIFS), we believe that good enough is a lie and education is the antidote to fear. Whether you are looking to purchase your first home-defense handgun or pursuing your Maryland Wear & Carry permit, this guide answers the 50 most common questions every beginner encounters—clearly, honestly, and without judgment.

SECTION 1: GUN SAFETY & HANDLING ESSENTIALS (Q1–Q10)

1. What are the Four Universal Rules of Gun Safety?

1) Treat every firearm as if it is loaded at all times. 2) Never point the muzzle at anything you are not willing to destroy. 3) Keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until your sights are on target and you have made the decision to fire. 4) Be sure of your target, what is in front of it, and what is beyond it.

2. I have never fired a gun before and feel nervous. Is that normal?

Yes, 100% normal. Nervousness simply means you respect the tool. In our classes at Cindy's Hot Shots, we move at your pace with zero yelling or pressure, starting with dummy rounds and dry-fire handling before any live rounds are introduced.

3. How do I know if a semi-automatic handgun is completely unloaded?

Always perform a physical and visual check: 1) Remove the magazine first. 2) Pull the slide back and lock it open. 3) Visually look inside the chamber, magazine well, and breach face. 4) Physically insert your index finger into the chamber and mag well to verify no round is present. Look away and check a second time.

4. Can a modern gun accidentally go off if it is dropped?

Quality modern striker-fired and hammer-fired handguns (from reputable makers like Glock, Sig Sauer, Smith & Wesson, etc.) feature internal drop safeties, firing pin blocks, and trigger blade safeties. They will not fire unless the trigger is deliberately pulled to the rear. Avoid cheap or antique firearms lacking modern drop safeties.

5. What is the difference between an external manual safety and an internal safety?

A manual safety is an external lever or switch on the frame/slide you must physically flip before the trigger will function. An internal safety (like a trigger bar tab or firing pin block) operates passively and automatically disengages only when your finger presses the trigger flat.

6. Do I need an external safety on my first gun?

It comes down to personal comfort and training. Many beginners feel more secure with a manual safety lever. However, a rigid Kydex holster that fully encloses the trigger guard provides absolute trigger protection, which is why many law enforcement officers and defensive carriers prefer modern striker systems without external levers.

7. What is 'dry-fire' practice, and will it damage my gun?

Dry firing means pressing the trigger on an empty chamber without live ammunition. With almost all modern centerfire handguns (9mm, .40, .45), dry fire is completely safe and is the #1 way to build trigger control, grip strength, and sight alignment at home without recoil or ammo cost. (For rimfire guns like .22 LR, use snap caps to protect the firing pin).

8. What are snap caps and dummy rounds?

Snap caps are inert, plastic or aluminum dummy cartridges containing a spring-cushioned false primer. They allow safe dry-fire practice, malfunction drills, and realistic loading/unloading repetitions in your living room without live ammo.

9. How should I store my firearm at home if I have children?

Under Maryland law (Jaelynn's Law / CR § 4-104), you cannot leave a loaded firearm in any location where an unsupervised child under 18 could gain access. You must use an active locking mechanism, such as a biometric quick-access lockbox or certified gun safe.

10. What is 'muzzle discipline'?

Muzzle discipline is the unconscious habit of keeping the front opening of your barrel pointed in a safe direction at all times—typically downrange at the backstop or down toward the floor—even when picking up, transferring, or racking the firearm.

SECTION 2: MARYLAND LAWS, LICENSES & PERMITS (Q11–Q20)

11. What is the difference between an HQL and a Wear & Carry Permit?

The HQL (Handgun Qualification License) only allows you to BUY, rent, or transfer a handgun to keep in your home or take to the range. A Wear & Carry Permit (CCW) gives you the legal authority to CARRY a concealed loaded firearm on your person in public throughout Maryland.

12. If I get my Wear & Carry Permit, do I still need a separate HQL class?

No! Once you complete the 16-hour Wear & Carry course, Maryland law allows you to apply for an HQL permit with a training exemption. That is why our Maryland CCW & HQL Combo is our most popular option—it covers both and saves you from paying twice.

13. What is Maryland 77R?

The 77R is the Maryland State Police electronic application to purchase or transfer a regulated firearm (handgun or lower receiver). After purchasing at an FFL dealer, there is a mandatory 7-day state waiting period before you can pick up the firearm.

14. What are the 5 Pillars of Lawful Self-Defense in Maryland?

Under Maryland precedent (*State v. Faulkner*), to legally justify deadly force you must prove: 1) Innocence (you did not provoke or start the altercation), 2) Imminent Danger (actual belief of immediate death or serious bodily injury), 3) Proportionality (force used matched lethal threat), 4) Avoidance/Duty to Retreat (outside your home, you must retreat if safely possible), and 5) Objective Reasonableness.

15. What is the 'Castle Doctrine' in Maryland?

Inside your personal home or dwelling (Crawford v. State), you have NO duty to retreat before defending yourself against violent intruders threatening death or serious bodily harm. However, deadly force is NEVER lawful solely to protect property (e.g. car in driveway, tools, cash).

16. Can I carry my handgun into banks, restaurants, or parks in Maryland?

Under Maryland Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), firearms are strictly prohibited in government buildings, polling places, school grounds, health care facilities, and establishments that serve alcohol or cannabis for on-site consumption. Always know your route before carrying.

17. What is Jaelynn's Law?

Enacted in Maryland in 2023, Jaelynn's Law mandates that loaded firearms be secured with a lock or safe in any residence where a minor under 18 can gain unsupervised access. Violations carry severe criminal penalties.

18. What is the 72-Hour Reporting Rule in Maryland?

Under MD Public Safety § 5-146, if your firearm is lost or stolen, you must report the loss to your local police department or Maryland State Police within 72 hours of discovering it.

19. How long is my Maryland Wear & Carry Permit valid, and what is the renewal?

Initial permits are valid for 2 to 3 years (expiring on the last day of your birth month). Renewals require an 8-hour refresher class and must be submitted at least 90 days prior to expiration to avoid lapses.

20. What is an ERPO (Extreme Risk Protective Order)?

Maryland's 'Red Flag' law allows law enforcement, family members, or medical professionals to petition the District Court to temporarily remove firearms from an individual deemed an imminent danger to themselves or others.

SECTION 3: CHOOSING YOUR FIRST FIREARM & CALIBER (Q21–Q30)

21. What caliber should I choose for my first defensive handgun?

9mm Luger (9x19mm) is the industry standard recommendation for 95% of shooters. It offers the ideal balance of manageable recoil, affordable practice ammunition, high magazine capacity, and proven terminal ballistics with modern defensive hollow points.

22. Is a smaller micro-pistol easier for a beginner to shoot?

Actually, no! Tiny, ultra-light micro-compact pistols have sharp, snappy recoil and short sight radiuses, making them harder for beginners to shoot accurately. A compact handgun (like a Glock 19 or Sig P365-XMacro) is much easier to control and learn on while still concealable.

23. Should I buy a revolver or a semi-automatic pistol?

Revolvers have simple mechanics and no slides to rack, but they have heavy trigger pulls (10-12 lbs) and hold only 5-6 rounds. Modern semi-automatics hold 10-17 rounds, have lighter, cleaner triggers (4-5.5 lbs), and reload quickly. For most modern defensive needs, semi-autos are preferred.

24. Should I buy a handgun before taking my first class?

We strongly advise AGAINST buying a gun before your first class! In our FIFS classes, you will handle and fire different platforms to see what fits your hand size, finger reach, and recoil tolerance before you spend hundreds of dollars.

25. What is the difference between striker-fired and hammer-fired pistols?

A striker-fired pistol uses an internal spring-loaded firing pin (striker) for an identical, consistent trigger pull every shot. A hammer-fired pistol has an external or internal hammer that strikes the firing pin, often featuring Double-Action/Single-Action pulls.

26. What are red-dot optics (reflex sights), and are they worth it?

A red-dot optic projects an illuminated reticle onto an optical window. Instead of lining up three iron sights and focusing on the front blade, you stay threat-focused on your target and place the dot where you want the bullet to go. They dramatically speed up target acquisition.

27. What is 'grip friction' and hand fit?

Your master grip is the single most important factor in recoil control. Your gun should allow your strong-hand trigger finger to rest comfortably on the trigger face without turning your wrist, and leave enough frame space for your support hand palm to clamp down firmly.

28. What ammunition should I buy for practice vs. self-defense?

For practice and training, buy affordable Full Metal Jacket (FMJ) brass target ammo (115gr or 124gr in 9mm). For defensive carry and home security, load premium Jacketed Hollow Point (JHP) ammo (like Federal HST or Speer Gold Dot) that expands on impact to prevent over-penetration.

29. What is a 'micro-chassis' system (like the Flux Raider)?

A micro-chassis (such as the Flux Raider P365) takes the Fire Control Unit of a subcompact pistol and houses it in a stabilized, collapsible braced platform. This adds multiple points of contact, extending accurate defensive reach out to 50+ yards with minimal recoil.

30. How much does safe firearm ownership typically cost?

A reliable defensive handgun runs \$450–\$650. Essential safety gear (ANSI Z87.1 eye protection, electronic hearing protection, biometric safe, and quality holster) costs around \$150–\$250. Training with FIFS fulfills your state compliance and builds foundational safety from day one.

SECTION 4: MARYLAND TRANSPORT & RANGE PROTOCOLS (Q31–Q40)

31. How do I legally transport a firearm in Maryland WITHOUT a Wear & Carry permit?

Maryland transport law is strict: The firearm must be completely UNLOADED and secured in an enclosed case or lockbox. Ammunition must be in a separate container. Both must be stored in your vehicle trunk (or in the rearmost compartment if your vehicle lacks a trunk). You may only transport directly between your home, range, gun shop, or repair facility with no non-essential stops.

32. Can I bring live ammunition into the classroom during my FIFS course?

STRICTLY NO. Future Initiative enforces a zero-tolerance classroom safety policy: Absolutely NO live ammunition is permitted in the classroom at any time. All ammo must remain locked in your car trunk until we transition to the live-fire range.

33. What eye and ear protection should I bring to the range?

Bring wrap-around ballistic eye protection (ANSI Z87.1 rated). For hearing protection, we strongly recommend active electronic earmuffs: they amplify normal speech from Instructor Kai Wade while instantly compressing loud gunfire to safe decibels.

34. What should I wear to the shooting range?

Wear closed-toe shoes (sneakers or boots—no sandals), a crew-neck t-shirt (to prevent hot brass casings from falling down your shirt), long pants, and a baseball cap with a forward brim to deflect spent casings.

35. What is a 'cease fire' command at the range?

'CEASE FIRE' is an emergency command. Whoever shouts it (instructor, range officer, or student), you must instantly stop shooting, take your finger off the trigger, point the muzzle downrange, place the firearm on the bench, and step back behind the firing line.

36. What is a 'squib load', and why is it dangerous?

A squib load occurs when a cartridge lacks sufficient powder and the bullet gets stuck inside the barrel. It produces an unusually quiet 'pop' and weak recoil. NEVER fire another shot! If you hear a pop, keep the gun pointed downrange, wait 30 seconds, unload, and have an instructor check the bore.

37. What happens if my gun jams or fails to fire at the range?

Keep the muzzle pointed safely downrange! Wait at least 30 seconds in case of a 'hangfire' (delayed ignition). If in a class, raise your non-shooting hand for Instructor Kai Wade. To clear typical stoppages: Tap the magazine base, Rack the slide vigorously, and Assess (the Tap-Rack-Assess drill).

38. What is the live-fire qualification course for Maryland Wear & Carry?

Students shoot the official Maryland 25-round course of fire on a full-size B-27 silhouette target at distances of 3, 5, 7, and 15 yards. You must achieve a score of at least 70% (18 out of 25 hits inside the scoring rings) to earn your state certification.

39. Can I take photos or video of my range session?

Yes! We encourage capturing your student milestones. Coach Wade will often take photo records of your target groupings so you can see your diagnostic progression from your first round to your final qualification.

40. Where does FIFS conduct live-fire training?

Our primary certified range facility is Cindy's Hot Shots (115 Holsum Way, Glen Burnie, MD), featuring modern indoor climate-controlled lanes, professional air filtration, and advanced target carriers.

SECTION 5: CARRYING CONCEALED, GEAR & NEXT STEPS (Q41–Q50)

41. What is the best holster type for everyday concealed carry?

Always choose a rigid, custom-molded Kydex holster made specifically for your gun model. Never use floppy universal nylon or soft leather holsters—they can fold into the trigger guard and cause a discharge when holstering.

42. What is 'printing', and is it illegal in Maryland?

Printing occurs when the outline of your holstered firearm visibly presses through your clothing. Under Maryland SB 1, carrying concealed means keeping the handgun hidden from ordinary public observation, though momentary accidental exposure (e.g. reaching for an item) is protected by statute. A sturdy gun belt prevents printing.

43. What is a proper 'gun belt', and do I really need one?

Yes! Standard department-store dress belts stretch and sag under the 1.5–2 lb weight of a loaded pistol. A dedicated reinforced gun belt (with an internal core or ratcheting system) keeps your holster locked securely in place during movement and draw.

44. What should I do if I am pulled over by law enforcement while legally carrying?

1) Turn on your interior dome light and roll down your window. 2) Keep both hands visible on the steering wheel at 10 and 2. 3) Calmly inform the officer: 'Officer, I want to let you know that I am a licensed Maryland Wear & Carry permit holder, and I am currently carrying my firearm.' 4) Follow instructions and do not reach for your permit or weapon until directed.

45. What is the 'Duty to Retreat' when outside my home in Maryland?

Outside of your dwelling, Maryland law requires you to safely retreat from a confrontation if a safe, unobstructed route exists before resorting to deadly force. You can only use lethal force if retreat is impossible, unsafe, or would increase your peril.

46. What should I say to 911 immediately after a defensive shooting?

Provide only the essential emergency facts: 1) Your location. 2) 'I was attacked and had to defend myself. Please send police and an ambulance.' 3) Describe your appearance so arriving officers know who you are. Do NOT give lengthy recorded monologues on the 911 line under extreme adrenaline.

47. How often should I clean and lubricate my handgun?

Clean your firearm after every live-fire range session, or at least once every 1–2 months if you carry it daily (to remove accumulated lint and dust). A light drop of gun oil on the slide frame rails and barrel hood is all that is needed.

48. How do digital training tools (like MantisX or VR) improve my skills?

Systems like MantisX track micro-movement in your barrel during your trigger press, showing exactly why your shots hit low or left. VR simulators (like Ace XR) allow you to practice target transitions and dynamic shoot/no-shoot decision-making at home between range visits.

49. Can I legally carry my Maryland Wear & Carry permit in other states?

Reciprocity varies. Maryland permits are recognized in several states (e.g. Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina depending on current reciprocity pacts), but Maryland does not recognize out-of-state permits. Always verify active reciprocity before crossing state lines.

50. How do I get started with Future Initiative Firearm Services?

Visit trainwithfifs.com, select your training pathway (HQL, Wear & Carry, or Private 1-on-1 Coaching), and submit your intake consultation. Coach Kai Wade will review your goals and schedule your personalized, zero-intimidation training session.

FUTURE INITIATIVE FIREARM SERVICES

Lead Instructor: **Kai Wade** • Certified MSP Qualified Handgun Instructor • NRA Certified

Official Website: <https://trainwithfifs.com> | Inquiries: info@trainwithfifs.com | Call/Text: **(443) 990-1304**

Primary Range: **Cindy's Hot Shots** (115 Holsum Way, Glen Burnie, MD)

"The Future is Now, Take the Initiative!"