

Fact Sheet: Suicide

More than 30,000 Americans commit suicide each year. Knowing the signs can help you recognize a friend or family member in need. Learn how to help a friend.

Important: If you or someone you love is considering suicide, call the National Hopeline Network at 1-800-SUICIDE, or call 9-1-1 for help.

Suicide in the United States

The Problem

- Suicide took the lives of 29,350 Americans in 2000.¹
- More people die from suicide than from homicide. In 2000, there were 1.7 times as many suicides as homicides.¹
- Overall, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for all Americans, and is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15-24.¹
- Males are more than four times more likely to die from suicide than are females.¹ However, females are more likely to attempt suicide than are males.²
- In 1999, white males accounted for 72% of all suicides. Together, white males and white females accounted for over 90% of all suicides.¹ However, during the period from 1979-1992, suicide rates for Native Americans (a category that includes American Indians and Alaska Natives) were about 1.5 times the national rates. There was a disproportionate number of suicides among young male Native Americans during this period, as males 15-24 accounted for 64% of all suicides by Native Americans.³
- Suicide rates are generally higher than the national average in the western states and lower in the eastern and midwestern states.⁴
- 57% of suicides in 2000 were committed with a firearm.¹

Suicide Among the Elderly

- Suicide rates increase with age and are highest among Americans aged 65 years and older. The ten year period, 1980-1990, was the first decade since the 1940s that the suicide rate for older residents rose instead of declined.⁵
- Men accounted for 84% of suicides among persons aged 65 years and older in 2000.¹

- From 1980-1998, the largest relative increases in suicide rates occurred among those 80-84 years of age. The rate for men in this age group increased 17% (from 43.5 per 100,000 to 52.0).^{1,6}
- Firearms were the most common method of suicide by both males and females, 65 years and older, in 2000, accounting for 79.5% of male and 37% of female suicides in that age group.¹
- Suicide rates among the elderly are highest for those who are divorced or widowed. In 1992, the rate for divorced or widowed men in this age group was 2.7 times that for married men, 1.4 times that for never-married men, and over 17 times that for married women. The rate for divorced or widowed women was 1.8 times that for married women and 1.4 times that for never-married women.⁶
- Risk factors for suicide among older persons differ from those among the young. Older persons have a higher prevalence of depression, a greater use of highly lethal methods and social isolation. They also make fewer attempts per completed suicide, have a higher-male-to-female ratio than other groups, have often visited a health-care provider before their suicide, and have more physical illnesses.⁷

Suicide Among the Young

- Persons under age 25 accounted for 15% of all suicides in 2000.¹ From 1952-1995, the incidence of suicide among adolescents and young adults nearly tripled. From 1980-1997, the rate of suicide among persons aged 15-19 years increased by 11% and among persons aged 10-14 years by 109%. From 1980-1996, the rate increased 105% for African-American males aged 15-19.^{1,8}
- For young people 15-24 years old, suicide is the third leading cause of death, behind unintentional injury and homicide. In 1999, more teenagers and young adults died from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, and chronic lung disease combined.¹
- Among persons aged 15-19 years, firearm-related suicides accounted for more than 60% of the increase in the overall rate of suicide from 1980-1997.¹
- The risk for suicide among young people is greatest among young white males; however, from 1980 through 1995, suicide rates increased most rapidly among young black males.⁹ Although suicide among young children is a rare event, the dramatic increase in the rate among persons aged 10-14 years underscores the urgent need for intensifying efforts to prevent suicide among persons in this age group.

References

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