Suicide is when people direct violence at themselves with the intent to end their lives, and they die as a result of their actions. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States.

A suicide attempt is when people harm themselves with the intent to end their lives, but they do not die as a result of their actions. Many more people survive suicide attempts than die, but they often have serious injuries. However, a suicide attempt does not always result in a physical injury.

To learn more about suicide and other self-directed violence, please visit: http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pub/selfdirected_violence.html

### Why is suicide a public health problem?

Suicide is a significant problem in the United States:

- 39,518 people killed themselves in 2011.¹
- Over 483,586 people with self-inflicted injuries were treated in U.S. emergency departments in 2012.¹
- Suicide and self-inflicted injuries result in an estimated $41.2 billion in combined medical and work loss costs.¹

These numbers underestimate this problem. Many people who have suicidal thoughts or make suicide attempts never seek services.²

### Who is at risk for suicide?

There is no single cause of suicide. Several factors can increase a person’s risk for attempting or dying by suicide. However, having these risk factors does not always mean that suicide will occur.

Risk factors for suicide include:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- History of depression or other mental illness
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Family history of suicide or violence
- Physical illness
- Feeling alone

Suicide affects everyone, but some groups are at higher risk than others. Men are about four times more likely than women to die from suicide.¹ However, women are more likely to express suicidal thoughts and to make nonfatal attempts than men.³ The prevalence of suicidal thoughts, suicide planning, and suicide attempts is significantly higher among young adults aged 18-29 years than it is among adults aged ≥30 years.³ Other groups with higher rates of suicidal behavior include American Indian and Alaska Natives, rural populations, and active or retired military personnel.⁴

Note: This is only some information about risk. To learn more, go to http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html.
Understanding Suicide

How can we prevent suicide?

Suicide is a significant public health problem, and there is a lot to learn about how to prevent it. One strategy is to learn about the warning signs of suicide, which can include individuals talking about wanting to hurt themselves, increasing substance use, and having changes in their mood, diet, or sleeping patterns. When these warning signs appear, quickly connecting the person to supportive services is critical. Promoting opportunities and settings that strengthen connections among people, families, and communities is another suicide prevention goal.


Where can I learn more?

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

CDC Facebook Page on Violence Prevention
www.facebook.com/vetoviolence

National Institute for Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

Suicide Prevention Resource Center
www.sprc.org

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

References


How does CDC approach prevention?

CDC uses a four-step approach to address public health problems like suicide.

Step 1: Define the problem
Before we can prevent suicide, we need to know how big the problem is, where it occurs, and who it affects. CDC learns about a problem by gathering and studying data. These data are critical because they help us know where prevention is most needed.

Step 2: Identify risk and protective factors
It is not enough to know that suicide affects certain people in certain areas. We also need to know why. CDC conducts and supports research to answer this question. We can then develop programs to reduce or get rid of risk factors and to increase protective factors.

Step 3: Develop and test prevention strategies
Using information gathered in research, CDC develops and evaluates strategies to prevent suicide.

Step 4: Ensure widespread adoption
In this final step, CDC shares the best prevention strategies. CDC may also provide funding or technical help so communities can adopt these strategies.

For more information on suicide prevention activities at CDC, please visit http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide.