

U.S. suicide rates rose in 2021, reversing 2 years of decline

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The suicide rate in the United States increased in 2021, following two

years of decline, according to preliminary data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The number of suicides increased to 47,646 in 2021, up from 45,979 in 2020, according to researchers at the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

As a result, the U.S. suicide rate also increased to 14 suicides for every 100,000 people, up from 13.5 per 100,000 in 2020, according to data published in the CDC's *Vital Statistics Rapid Release*.

However, the numbers from 2021 remain lower than the peak set in 2018, suicide [prevention](#) experts noted.

Still, "the uptick is certainly concerning," said Colleen Carr, director of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. "It reinforces that we need to continue to invest in suicide prevention and a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention."

Suicide rates rose by 30% in the United States between 2000 and 2018, before declining in 2019 and 2020.

In July, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched a national crisis line, and the new numbers appear to support the need for it.

People contemplating suicide or suffering a [mental health](#) or substance abuse crisis now can [call 988 for immediate counseling](#), much as 911 is now used to report a physical emergency.

Also putting mental health in the spotlight, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended last week that [screening for anxiety](#) be part of doctor visits.

Did COVID play a part?

The COVID-19 pandemic might have played a role in this increase in suicides for a couple of reasons, experts said.

"We have seen during the pandemic increased reports of mental health distress," Carr said. "Any time that people are feeling more mental health distress, there also is a potential increase for suicide."

But the rate also could be rising because lockdowns and social distancing renewed the public's awareness of [mental health issues](#) and suicide, said Kimberly Torguson, the action alliance's director of engagement and communications.

New Harris Poll numbers show that more than 8 out of 10 adults (84%) believe the pandemic made it more important than ever to consider suicide prevention a national priority, Torguson noted.

"When there's a greater awareness and understanding of an issue like suicide, we often see stigma go down and reporting and investigations go up because people are more open and prone to say that this was a suicide attempt or suicide-related death," Torguson said. "That could be one of the reasons we're seeing a slight increase."

Young men 15 to 24 were hit hardest, with an 8% increase in their suicide rate. Increases also occurred among men 25 to 44 and 65 to 75, according to the report.

Overall, the increase in the number of suicides was 4% for men and 2% for women, while the suicide rate increased 3% for men and 2% for women.

Men typically have higher [suicide rates](#) than women because they have

access to lethal means, Carr said.

Mysteriously, the age group of men most at risk for suicide—45 to 64—wasn't affected by these recent increases, noted Jill Harkavy-Friedman, senior vice president of research for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

"We really don't know what's driving this increase among males, but not among middle-aged males who tend to have the higher rates to begin with," Harkavy-Friedman said. "We simply don't have enough information yet."

Because the provisional CDC report only includes data for age and gender among suicides, it's hard to read much more into the report, the experts said.

"We have to take these numbers as a cautionary note that we still have to be concerned about suicide. We're not getting it to go down yet," Harkavy-Friedman said. "But in terms of understanding where the differences are, until we see the rest of the data, we really can't even theorize about it."

People want to help

The new Harris Poll was sponsored by the AFSP and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. It also found that 94% of people see [suicide](#) as a preventable public [health](#) issue. Further, 83% say they'd be interested in learning how they could help someone who might be suicidal.

"The vast majority of people would want to do something to help someone else," Harkavy-Friedman said. "People are learning that if you're worried about someone you can call 988, either with them in the

room or without, to find out what to do so that you can help them."

The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health says that [warning signs of suicide](#) include:

- Talking about wanting to die, feeling great guilt or shame, or believing they are a burden to those around them.
- Planning or researching ways to die.
- Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important and personal items, or making a will.
- Taking dangerous risks.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns.
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [suicide prevention](#).

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