

Queensland suicide rate unaffected during first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic

November 17 2020



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Up until the end of August there was no overall change in Queensland's suspected suicide rate between since the declaration of a public health emergency declaration (PHED) on January 29. However, the COVID-19

pandemic has contributed to some suspected suicides.

In a study published this week in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, Griffith University researchers from the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention analyzed data from the interim Queensland Suicide Register (iQSR). They found the unadjusted [suicide](#) rates were 14.85 and 14.07 per 100,000 people before (January 2015 to January 2020) and after the PHED (February to August 2020).

Lead researcher Dr. Stuart Leske said there was evidence of increased suicides during previous infectious disease outbreaks, including the 1918-1920 influenza [pandemic](#) in the US and the [severe acute respiratory syndrome](#) (SARS) in Hong Kong in 2003. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic may increase suicides by impacting vulnerable groups and the economy.

"Specifically, this might include increased anxiety, depression, alcohol use, [social isolation](#), [domestic violence](#), economic hardship and reduced opportunities for social interaction," he said.

"While we did not expect the State Government's declaration of a PHED in Queensland on January 29 to immediately increase suicide rate, we did expect it to increase anxiety, depression and stress that could contribute to increased suspected suicides in subsequent months. To our knowledge, this is the first study reported to consider seasonality and pre-COVID trends in suicide mortality."

Dr. Leske said while the overall suicide rate was unaffected, COVID-19 had contributed to at least 36 suspected suicides in Queensland from February to August.

"However, this is not to say the impact of COVID-19 was the sole precipitant of the suspected suicide," he said.

"We found that an impact on mood, stress, coping, and anxiety was most frequent, indicating that the increased focus on mental health supports is warranted, especially for those with pre-existing mental health conditions or those who remain unemployed as the pandemic persists. As psychological and psychosocial factors preceded most COVID-19-related suicides, it is, therefore, possible to expect an increased impact of COVID-19 on suicides in countries and regions with more COVID-19 infections and deaths."

More information: Stuart Leske et al. Real-time suicide mortality data from police reports in Queensland, Australia, during the COVID-19 pandemic: an interrupted time-series analysis, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30435-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30435-1)

Provided by Griffith University

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