

November 20, 2020

RE: Rise in total confirmed suicides in Pima County during Qtr. 4 of current calendar year.

Dear Community Providers,

This alert is to update you on recent suicide trends that we have tracked as part of ongoing fatality surveillance. Our last provider alert was issued on May 1, 2020 to report a sudden spike in suicides that began in early March and lasted approximately four weeks. We have since identified a similar increase that began in October and has continued into November. Additional demographic data also displays significant changes in certain age groups. The primary focus of this alert is to highlight the overall changing trends in total suicides and to identify age groups most impacted.

Figure 1. Confirmed Suicides by Epi Week, January 1 - November 14, 2020

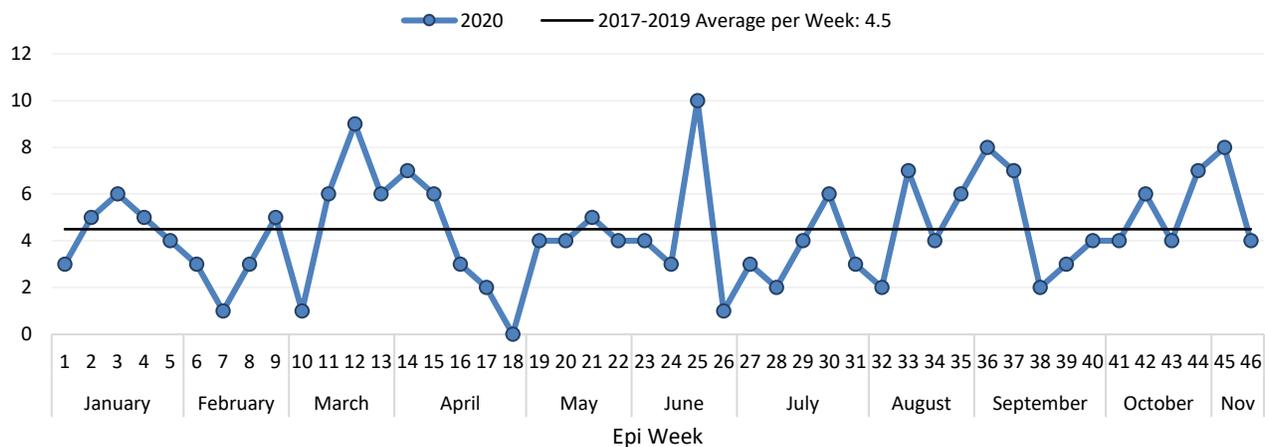
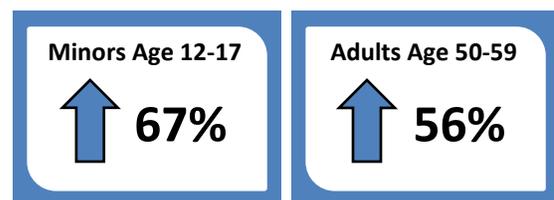


Figure 1: In 2020, there have been a total of 204 confirmed suicides through the middle of November. While this point in time count is still below 2019’s annual total of 253, we have recently begun to see concerning changes in the number of weekly suicides observed during weeks 33-46 pictured above. Using a line to display a three-year average (4.5/week), the time series above confirms that our weekly suicide count has exceeded the set average a total of seven times in 14 weeks.

Figure 2: A closer look at suicides by age group, compared to the same time period in 2019, showed significant changes in two age groups, featured to the right in percent increases. Specifically, there have been 10 minors age 12-17, and 39 adults age 50-59 who have died by suicide in 2020.

Figure 2. Percent Increase in Suicides by Age Group, Epi Weeks 1-46 2019 vs 2020



Summary: Increased stress levels for all ages have been felt widely across our community and our state during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, numerous people are now in need of mental health services for the first time in their lives, while those with existing mental health needs are under immeasurable strain. This is particularly true for our vulnerable populations struggling with severe mental illness and addiction. Also of note, these increased demands have simultaneously placed the same stress on our local behavioral health front line workers combatting the mental health crisis. All of these concurrent factors have the potential to overwhelm the provider network at multiple levels of care including hospitals, residential facilities, and outpatient programs, much like the pandemic has taxed our health care system.

Considerations: While suicides overall in 2020 are currently lower than the 2019 total, the same cannot be said for older adults and minors so far this year. Age could be playing an important role in current risk factors for suicide and should be closely monitored, particularly with minors (ages 5-17), young adults (ages 18-25), and older adults (ages 50+). These groups may have an even greater exposure to pandemic stressors. Older adults may find themselves in more extensive periods of isolation and greater fear of medical risks. Children may struggle with altered school routines, lack of activity, and limited socialization. Additionally, young adults face the unique pressure of transitioning to adulthood in a pandemic era that has increased the difficulty of entering the workforce, securing housing, or entering college.

Help Prevent Suicide:

- Make an organizational commitment: [About Zero Suicide](#)
- Create policy to help others surrounding a suicide: [Suicide Postvention Information](#)
- Refer to the 2-1-1 crisis counseling program: [Resilient Arizona Crisis Counseling Program](#)
- Emphasize 24-hour crisis resources:

Local Community Wide Crisis Line:	1-866-495-6735 or 520-622-6000	National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:	1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Teen Lifeline , call or text:	602-248-TEEN (8336)	Veterans Crisis line:	1-800-273-8255 (press 1)
Substance Use Referral and Treatment Hotline:	1-800-662-HELP (4357)	Disaster Distress Helpline:	1-800-985-5990

The Health Department continues to conduct surveillance to closely monitor these changing trends and will keep you informed through updates. We hope this information will support treatment strategies, healthy messaging, and targeted resources for vulnerable populations at risk of suicide. To schedule free trainings for Suicide Prevention and Mental Health First Aid offered by certified public health instructors, visit www.pima.gov/mentalhealth or contact our team at CMHA@pima.gov. If you have specific questions about this alert please contact me directly at Mark.Person@pima.gov or 520-724-7518.

Sincerely,



Mark Person, MSP
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 Community Mental Health and Addiction