

Health officials urge Minnesotans to learn more about the warning signs of suicide and how to prevent it

Suicide Prevention Week is September 6-12

Minnesota health officials urge Minnesotans to learn more about preventing suicide during national Suicide Prevention Week, September 6-12.

The extent of suicide in Minnesota is significant:

- 571 people died by suicide in Minnesota in 2007, representing 11 deaths out of every 100,000.
- Suicide occurs in all age groups. In 2007, persons aged 50-64 years had the highest suicide rate of all age groups, at 16.1 deaths per 100,000 people.
- The number of Minnesotans who die by suicide each year is nearly five times higher than the number of homicide victims.

"Suicide results in the tragic loss of life as well as agonizing grief, fear and confusion in families and communities," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Sanne Magnan. "There are simple steps Minnesotans can take to be aware of the warning signs of suicide and to help prevent it."

Know the warning signs. People are encouraged to pay attention to signs that might indicate someone is considering or planning to end their life. These signs include:

- Statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness.
- Sudden change from a depressed mood to a happier, calmer mood.
- Giving away cherished possessions.
- Isolating oneself from friends or family.
- Making arrangements or setting one's affairs in order.
- Direct or indirect statements that reference death or dying.

Other risk factors include substance use, recent crisis or loss, family history of suicide or mental illness, access to firearms or other lethal means, past experiences of trauma, and chronic pain that doesn't respond to treatment.

Talk about it. If you are concerned about someone, ask that person whether they have thought about suicide. Research indicates that asking the following kinds of questions does not cause a person to start thinking about suicide.

- Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?
- When you feel sad, have you ever had thoughts of harming or killing yourself?
- Are you thinking about killing yourself? Have you thought about how you would do it?

You may need to ask the questions more than once, and in different ways. In response, do your best to listen without judgment. Let them know you care, that he or she is not alone, and that help is available. Offer to help them find a doctor or counselor, or offer to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline with them.

If someone is in immediate crisis, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). Do not hesitate to make such a call if you suspect that someone may be a danger to him- or herself. It could save that person's life.

Mobilize your community. Too often, people respond only after a tragedy has occurred. Instead, consider what you can do to promote mental health and well-being in your community and prevent suicide before someone is in crisis.

- Create a community task force to promote collaboration between mental health, public health, education and other service systems in your area.
- Find out what kinds of curricula and other activities are in place in local schools, and if there is more that can be done to promote problem-solving and coping skills among youth.
- Ask your faith communities, after-school programs, or other organizations to sponsor suicide prevention workshops to share information about suicide and how it can be prevented.

For more information, visit www.health.state.mn.us/suicideprevention, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (www.save.org), or the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (www.sprc.org).

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