

Suicide Risk and COVID-19

Adapted from: The Impact of Infectious Disease-Related Public Health Emergencies on Suicide, Suicidal Behavior, and Suicidal Thoughts¹



Read more here: <https://discoversociety.org/2020/11/04/on-the-relationship-between-pandemics-and-suicide/>

What do we know from past pandemics?

Russian Flu – Increase in suicides by 25%² in England and Wales

Spanish Flu – Suicide rates in the USA showed weak positive correlation with mortality rates from flu³

SARS – Significant increase in suicides in women 65 and older⁴

What factors might put someone at risk?

Yip et al⁵, examined suicides after SARS and found the following risk factors:

- a. Disconnection/Isolation
- b. Fear of becoming ill

The following factors may also increase risk during COVID-19:

- a. Financial Insecurity
- b. Pessimism (COVID Fatigue)

Keep an eye on your wellbeing

- a. Limit your time on the internet/social media and watching the news (if you find this upsetting)
- b. Monitor your mental health for early warning signs like chronic poor sleep, changes in appetite, increase in irritability, or a decreased enjoyment in activities
- c. Remove access to means.
 - i. Get rid of unused medications
 - ii. Lock up current medications
 - iii. Make sure any firearms are properly stored

Get creative in addressing loneliness

- a. Have regular video calls with friends and family (try having a meal or playing a game over Zoom together!)
- b. Find virtual community events like concerts or book clubs
- c. Try a new hobby

What can you do if you feel you need help?

- a. Access free virtual supports, like Wellness Together Canada ([ca.portal.gc](https://ca.portal.gc.ca))
- b. Call or text a crisis service (Call 1-833-456-4566 or Text 45645)
- c. Contact your health care professional
- d. If you need immediate help, call 911 or go to an emergency department

To access the most recent information on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting suicide rates worldwide visit: <https://f1000research.com/articles/9-1097>

1. Zortea TC*, Brenna CTA*, Joyce M, McClelland H, Tippet M, Tran MM, Arensman E, Corcoran P, Hatcher S, Heisel MJ, Links PS, O'Connor RC, Edgar NE, Cha Y, Guaiiana G, Williamson E, Sinyor M**, Platt S**. (2020.) The impact of infectious disease-related public health emergencies on suicide, suicidal behavior, and suicidal thoughts: A systematic review. *Crisis*. E-pub ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000753>
2. Honigsbaum, M. (2010). The great dread: Cultural and psychological impacts and responses to the "Russian" influenza in the United Kingdom, 1889-1893. *Social History of Medicine*, 23(2), 299-319. [10.1093/shm/hkq011](https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkq011)
3. The impact of epidemic, war, prohibition and media on suicide: United States, 1910-1920. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 22(2), 240-254. [10.1111/j.1943-278X.1992.tb00231.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-278X.1992.tb00231.x)
4. Chan, S. M. S., Chiu, F. K. H., Lam, C. W. L., Leung, P. Y. V., & Conwell, Y. (2006). Elderly suicide and the 2003 SARS epidemic in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 21(2), 113-118. [10.1002/gps.1432](https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.1432)
5. Yip, P. S. F. F., Cheung, Y. T., Chau, P. H., & Law, Y. W. (2010). The impact of epidemic outbreak: The case of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and suicide among older adults in Hong Kong. *Crisis*, 31(2), 86-92. [10.1027/0227-5910/a000015](https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000015)