

Suicide Facts: Prevention & Intervention



*Safety Tips for you
and Your Family
(<http://www.andvsa.org>)*

**If you need help, call 911 or
your local police emergency number**

If you or someone you know is hurting
Or considering suicide, please call
our Statewide Suicide Careline:
1-877-266-HELP (4357)

E. Suicide Facts

What is Alaska's Suicide Rate?

Alaska's suicide rate is consistently one of the highest in the nation; Rural Alaska has especially high suicide rates. Alaska's suicide rate is consistently one of the highest in the nation. In 2002, Alaska had 131 suicides for a rate of 20.9 for every 100,000 residents, almost twice the national average of 10.6 for every 100,000. Alaska Natives experience suicide rates that are nearly four times the national average. Alaskan males commit 86 percent of suicides and young males are especially inclined to take their own lives. Rural Alaska has an especially high suicide rates — averaging nearly twice that of urban Alaska. In 2000, according to the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, the suicide rate of rural Alaska was 40 for every 100,000 residents compared to 14 for every 100,000 residents in urban areas.

What Are The Causes?

Suicidal behavior has many underlying complex causes. Living in poverty, unemployment, loss of loved ones, arguments with family or friends, a breakdown in relationships and legal or work-related problems are all acknowledged as risk factors when affecting those who are predisposed or especially vulnerable to self-harm. A family history of suicide is a recognized risk factor. Other predisposing factors include alcohol and drug abuse, a history of physical or sexual abuse in childhood, and social isolation. Mental disorders, such as depression, alcohol and substance abuse, play a central role in a large proportion of suicides.

What Increases Risk?

Physical illness, particularly those that are painful or disabling, increase suicide risk. In addition, having access to means to kill oneself (most typically firearms, medicines, and agricultural poisons) is both an important risk factor in itself and an important determinant of whether a suicide death will occur. Having made a previous suicide attempt is an indicator of subsequent fatal suicidal behavior, particularly in the first six months after the first attempt.

What Decreases Risk?

There are also a number of factors that may protect people against suicidal feelings or acts. These include high-esteem and social "connectedness," especially with family and friends, having social support, possessing good coping skills, being in a stable and happy marriage, and commitment to a religion. Restricting access to means of suicide is particularly relevant when access can readily be controlled. There is an association between possession of handguns in the home and suicide rates.

For Those Who Are Grieving

The loss of a person by suicide is often experienced differently and more intensely than feelings of grief in the relatives and close friends after a death from natural causes. In general, there is still a taboo attached to the discussion of suicide and those bereaved by suicide may have fewer opportunities to share their grief with others. Communicating one's feelings is an important part of the healing process. For this reason, support groups for person's bereaved by suicide serve an important role. For more information on suicide facts contact the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council at (907) 269-4615 or visit the website at www.health.ak.us/suicideprevention.