Youth Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury in California

What It Is

Kidsdata.org provides the following indicators of youth suicide and self-inflicted injury:

- The percentage of students in grades 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year, by grade level, gender, level of school connectedness, parent education level, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

- The rate of suicide per 100,000 youth ages 15-24, along with the number of youth suicides by age group, gender, and race/ethnicity.

- The number and rate of hospital discharges for self-inflicted injuries among children and youth ages 5-20 overall, and the number of discharges by age group.

Why This Topic Is Important

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10-19 in the U.S., and rates of youth suicide and self-injury hospitalization are on the rise, especially among younger adolescents. A 2017 survey estimated that more than 1 in 6 high school students nationwide seriously considered suicide in the previous year, a figure nearly 20% higher than findings from a decade earlier. Between 2007 and 2015, suicide rates rose 130% for U.S. children ages 10-14 and 46% for youth ages 15-19. Similar to suicide trends, from 2001 to 2015 self-injury hospitalization rates increased by more than 130% for ages 10-14 and by 47% for ages 15-19. While self-inflicted injuries typically are not the result of suicide attempts and do not involve intent to die, non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is a risk factor for suicide. Data from a 2015 national survey show that in the previous year 18% of high school students had engaged in NSSI at least once, and 6% had engaged in NSSI six or more times.

Suicide risk is higher for some groups than for others. While female youth more often attempt suicide, males are more likely than females to die by suicide—although the gap is narrowing. Nationally, American Indian/Alaska Native youth have the highest suicide rate among racial/ethnic groups with data. In addition, sexual and gender minority youth are more likely to engage in suicidal behavior than their non-LGBTQ peers. Other common risk factors for youth suicide include mental illness, past...
**Percentage of Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide in the Previous Year, by Gender: 2015-2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year, by gender and grade level (e.g., in 2015-2017, an estimated 21.8% of female 9th graders in California seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year).

**Data Source:** WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2019).

**Percentage of Students Who Seriously Considered Attempting Suicide in the Previous Year, by Sexual Orientation: 2015-2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>California</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year, by sexual orientation (e.g., in 2015-2017, an estimated 45.5% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in California seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year).

**Data Source:** WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2019).

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**How Children Are Faring**

In 2015-2017, an estimated 16% of California 9th and 11th graders and 12% of non-traditional students seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year: in Grades 9 and 11, at least 20% of girls seriously considered suicide, compared with less than 12% of boys. Students with low levels of school connectedness were much more likely to have serious suicidal thoughts (32%) than their peers with medium (19%) or high (9%) connectedness. The proportion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who seriously considered attempting suicide (46%) was more than three times the estimate for straight youth (12%) and more than double the estimate for students unsure of their sexual orientation (22%).

The rate of hospitalization for non-fatal self-inflicted injuries among California children and youth ages 5-20 was 43 per 100,000 in 2014, 25% lower than the U.S. rate of 58 per 100,000. While the state’s rate of self-inflicted injury hospitalization has fluctuated over time, and has been on the rise since 2011, the latest figures are similar to those recorded 20 years earlier. Across counties with data in 2014, hospitalization rates for self-injury ranged from 24 per 100,000 young people (Riverside) to 71 per 100,000 (San Mateo). Youth ages 16-20 account for the majority of discharges for self-inflicted injuries statewide: 2164 of 3575 in 2014 (61%).

In 2016, 176 California teens ages 15-19 and 294 young adults ages 20-24 were known to have committed suicide. Statewide, the rate of youth suicide was 7.7 per 100,000 in 2014-2016, down from 9.4 per 100,000 in 1995-1997. Since 1999-2001—the first time period for which national comparison data are available—California's youth suicide rate has been lower than the U.S. rate, which has risen above 10 per 100,000 in recent years. Statewide and nationally, many more male than female youth die by suicide; in 2016, males accounted for more than three-quarters of youth suicides in California (372 of 470).

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**

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