



King County

Public Health Seattle & King County Office of the Director

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1300
Seattle, WA 98104-1818
206-296-4600 Fax 206-296-0166
TTY Relay: 711
www.kingcounty.gov/health

Department of Community and Human Services

Leonardo Flor, Director
401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 263-9100 Fax (206) 205-6565
TTY Relay 711

November 2, 2020

HEALTH ADVISORY:

Increased suicide risk - need to take action on prevention

Four young people under 18yo have died by suicide in King County during the month of October, as reported to Public Health. These tragedies appear to be unrelated to one another and are an increase from recent months and from the same month last year. Local data and disaster research suggest that suicide rates throughout our population may rise as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. The purpose of this health advisory is to highlight best practices and support all health care and social service providers in promoting well-being and safety for people of all ages. Our common goal is to prevent further escalation in this troubling trend.

This health advisory addresses the increased risk of people dying from suicide and unintentional overdose related to individual and community stressors, seasonal changes, and increased behavioral health challenges during this disillusionment phase of disaster response.

It's a difficult time for everyone. The on-going pandemic and the corresponding exhaustion and emotional fatigue that we are feeling continues, combined with seasonal changes and more difficulty connecting with the people and supports that typically help us cope. Young people may be even more at risk due to less access to their typical social networks. Please review or re-review the following guidance:

ACTIONS REQUESTED:

- Review the [behavioral health impact timeline](#) and [warning signs](#) of potential suicide risk.
- Ask patients and clients about risk factors, including recent loss or trauma, unsecured firearms or medications in the home, social isolation, and thoughts of suicide, death, or that life may be too much to bear.
- Assess suicide risk in greater depth with patients receiving related behavioral health care, leaving inpatient treatment, or with a history of suicidal behaviors or attempts.

- **Encourage** all patients and clients and their families to take the following actions:
 - Talk with each other about emotional health and coping with stress. Ask explicitly about suicide risk, particularly with adolescents, elders, and household members experiencing difficulties.
 - Secure all firearms and medications in the home as a precautionary measure. If someone in the household is at risk of suicide, removing firearms or medications from the home temporarily may be the most effective course of action.
 - Make a safety plan if concerned about suicidal thoughts or behaviors. One possible template is available [here](#). Share it with others in the household as appropriate.
 - Reach out to make positive connections with friends, family, coworkers, and others. Connectedness is a key protective factor against suicide and making connections is important to maintaining well-being.

Additional information:

- [These](#) are some things you can do to support your emotional health.
- Disaster experts observe that around six months after the beginning of a public disaster, the emotional reserves that carried people through to that point begin to wane.
- In this novel coronavirus pandemic, that coincides with a change in seasons leading to darker days and an election about which many people feel unease and fear.
- A sharp increase in firearm purchases during the pandemic indicates there may be a large number of new firearm owners who have had less access than usual to safety education.
- The combination of stressors and risk factors means health care and social service providers, as well as King County residents, must increase our vigilance about suicide risk.

RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS:

- Psychiatry Consultation Line (PCL) (consultation about adult clients): <https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/provider-consultation/psychiatry-consultation-line-pcl-faqs/>; 877-927-7924
- Seattle Children’s Partnership Access Line (consultation about child clients): <https://www.seattlechildrens.org/healthcare-professionals/access-services/partnership-access-line/wa-pal/>; 866-599-7257

RESOURCES FOR CLIENTS AND PATIENTS:

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 800-273-8255
- [Crisis Text Line](#): Text HOME to 741741
- [Crisis Connections](#): 866-427-4747
- [TeenLink](#): Call or text 866-833-6546
- [Washington Warm Line](#): 877-500-9276

- [WA Listens](#) (crisis line for stress related to COVID-19): 1-833-681-0211
- WA Department of Health mental and emotional well-being page:
<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/mental-and-emotional-well-being>
- KC Community Supports and Well-being webpage:
<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/support.aspx>



Patty Hayes, Director
Public Health – Seattle & King County



Leo Flor, Director
Department of Community & Human
Services