

## COVID spurs fears of surge in suicides

The rate of suicide—the second leading cause of death in the U.S. among people ages 10 to 34 and the tenth overall—rose by an average of 1 percent a year between 1999 and 2006, after which it rose at double that pace.

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Mental health professionals worry that the social isolation, financial hardships and anxiety related to the coronavirus pandemic might worsen suicide trends. [Past research](#) in Europe and in the U.S. has shown that for every 1 percent rise in unemployment, there is a 0.8 to 1 percent jump in suicides. The pattern could be different in 2020 if people get back to work quickly or if the response is more akin to that in a time of war. “The rates go down in wartime, maybe because people feel more joined to a larger cause,” says Michael Hogan.

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Hogan, who is also a founder of the [Zero Suicide](#) movement, argues that rather than waiting to address such massive issues as mental illness, unemployment and loneliness, it makes sense to focus on low-cost interventions that start closer to the critical period when thoughts of suicide take hold. One key idea is to ensure that medical personnel screen for such thoughts as routinely as they check blood pressure and to train them in next steps for vulnerable people. A number of interventions, including support from crisis hotlines, could save lives—if offered in time.

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