COVID-19 and the Increased Risk of Suicides

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been some concern that the national suicide rate could increase. One in three people who die by suicide are unemployed and since the outbreak of COVID-19, 3.3 million Americans have submitted unemployment insurance claims. Historically, there is a correlation between an increased unemployment rate and an increase in suicide rates. During the 1929 stock market crash, the suicide rate in the United States increased from 17 per 100,000 people in 1929 to 21.3 in 1932. If the U.S. rate jumps in the same manner it did after the 1929 stock market crash, then the national suicide rate could rise to 16.6 per 100,000. In other words, 2021 could see more than 54,000 deaths by suicide (versus about 48,000 in 2018).

During this time, Americans are not only stockpiling toilet paper and hand sanitizer but firearms as well. Firearms are used in half of suicides and the prevalence of firearms increases the likelihood of suicide completion. As more people obtain firearms, combined with isolation and an increased unemployment rate, the suicide rate could increase.

Across the United States, people are practicing social distancing and isolating themselves. Social distancing and quarantines could increase suicidal thoughts and could lead to an increase in suicide attempts. Social connection is a crucial part of suicide prevention. The more connected people are, the less likely they are to die by suicide. During this time, it's important to stay connected to your friends and family virtually. Mental Health Association Oklahoma also offers virtual support groups for people dealing with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and thoughts of suicide. Visit mhaok.org/support-groups to find out more.

If you or someone you know is dealing with thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

Sources:


https://everytownresearch.org/firearm-suicide/