

May 1, 2020

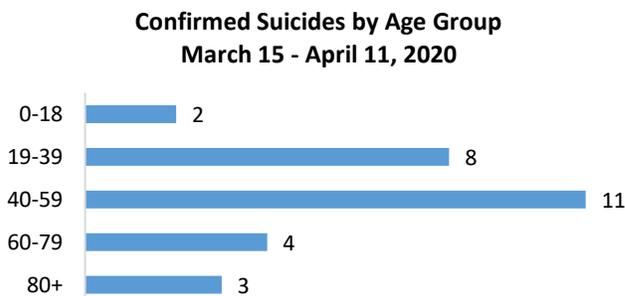
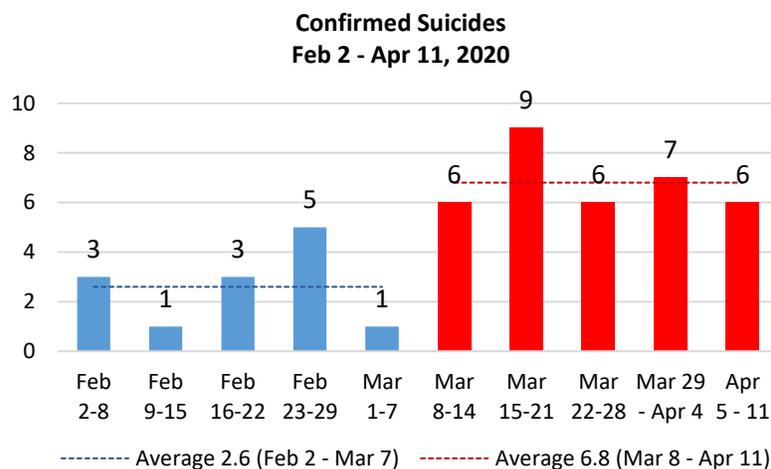
RE: Spike in number of confirmed suicides in Pima County UPDATED from the 4/14/20 health alert.

Dear Community Providers,

This alert serves as an update to the letter regarding a spike in suicides dated 4/14/20. At that time, the Pima County Health Department identified a concerning spike in the number of suicides throughout the month of March 2020. The sharpest increase at that time was 15 suicides within a 14-day span. We continue to conduct daily surveillance of this trend in order to provide timely updates for direct service providers to support efforts in prevention, treatment, and crisis intervention.

Update: We have reviewed an additional 13 confirmed suicides in the 14 days that immediately followed the initial alert (March 29 through April 11). These 13 additional deaths now show a steady average of one per day since the spike began in early March, highlighted in red on the bar graph below.

Summary: Since the initial alert, the spike in suicides has not increased from the previous time period, but remains at a high level and continues to warrant observation and alerting our local provider network. Our observation and reporting will continue to be of particular importance as we move further into the pandemic and the environmental triggers that exacerbate stress, anxiety, and trauma-like symptoms continue.



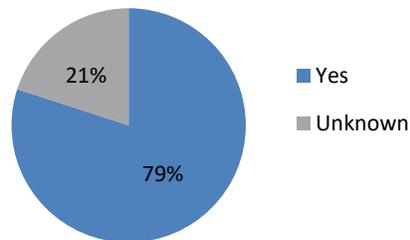
Additional detail about the age groups has been included in the second graph, to the left. The majority of these deaths have been in individuals over the age of 40, particularly the 40-59 age group.

As indicated previously, financial stressors, isolation, lack of natural support systems, and reduced access to resources has placed

vulnerable populations at an elevated risk. Given the disproportionate amount of stress placed on vulnerable populations, we encourage additional focus and general awareness of the unique impact felt by individuals living in poverty, families living in poverty with school-age children, minority groups, and

people with chronic health conditions. Concern for people who have recently experienced unemployment, divorce, domestic violence, or child removal should also receive targeted support and reassurance whenever possible.

**Confirmed Mental Illness and/or
Co-occurring Medical Condition in
Confirmed Suicides
March 15 - April 11, 2020**



Updates regarding comorbidities can also be viewed in the chart to the left. People with chronic health conditions should be considered for more frequent check-ins to mitigate their sense of fear and danger. The presence of an underlying medical condition not only places the individual at risk of more severe illness from the virus, but also more severe symptoms of stress and anxiety. This is important in order to be inclusive of all risk factors during the pandemic.

Risk factors for anxiety, depression, trauma, and self-harm:

- Presence of a chronic health condition that matches the COVID-19 high-risk categories (i.e. cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, respiratory disease, and/or immunocompromised).
- Presence of a mental health diagnosis (particularly anxiety, depression, psychosis, and mood disorders).
- People experiencing unemployment, those who have lost housing, are encountering divorce or domestic violence, and students experiencing difficulty with school closures, e-learning, or cancelled graduation ceremonies.
- Individuals living in apartments, condos, and residential programs where small living spaces are paired with densely populated areas or buildings.

Please note that all of the above data is based on point in time surveillance of fluid data sets that change frequently. The Pima County Health Department will continue to conduct surveillance to closely monitor these trends and send updates as needed. We hope this information will support treatment strategies, healthy messaging, and targeted resources for vulnerable populations at risk of suicide and for those most impacted by social distancing and isolation. If you have questions, please contact our Community Mental Health and Addiction team at CMHA@Pima.Gov. Thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Mark Person, MSP
Program Manager
Community Mental Health and Addiction