

Message from Sara H. Cody, M.D., Santa Clara County Health Officer Epi-Aid Preliminary Report on Youth Suicide



In November of 2015, the California Department of Public Health, on behalf of the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist our community in better understanding youth suicide in Santa Clara County.

In partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the CDC is conducting an Epi-Aid investigation on youth suicide. Using a public health approach, the purpose of this Epi-Aid is to understand the characteristics and trends of fatal and non-fatal suicidal behavior among youth in Santa Clara County.

This is an important issue for our community. While suicide is preventable, it is still among the top ten leading causes of death in the United States. It is the second leading cause of death among youth 10-24 years old. Mental illness is one of the most highly stigmatized health conditions in the United States and many of those who experience a mental illness rarely seek help. This **preliminary report**, and ultimately the final report, provides data to inform our decisions and help improve the lives of youth experiencing a mental health crisis or condition.

As you may know, Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers from the CDC and SAMHSA came to Santa Clara County in February 2016 to examine a variety of data sources. They met with local organizations and agencies that have been working on suicide prevention and youth wellness, and they discussed suicide prevention programs and activities. These organizations included representatives from county and city agencies and community-based organizations, school district administrators, school staff and faculty, healthcare and mental health providers, and others.

The sub-set of information in the **preliminary report** will be included in the final report, which should be released by the end of the year. As you will see, this early look includes information on youth suicide rates, demographic characteristics of suicide deaths in youth ages 10 to 24 years, and factors associated with youth deaths by suicide. Among other findings, it shows that youth suicide has increased in Santa Clara County since 2003, mirroring trends in California and the United States as a whole. Youth deaths by suicides are more common among males and youth ages 20 to 24.

In addition, almost all youth deaths by suicide had precipitating factors, such as a recent crisis or a current mental health problem, highlighting the importance of and potential for intervention. Similarly, data from school districts suggest that preventable factors like bullying and substance use are related to suicide ideation among high-school students. The **preliminary report** also includes initial recommendations for a multi-layered approach, and increasing awareness of factors that may lead to suicide and available resources.

This early report, is not and was not meant to be, a comprehensive picture of youth suicide in the county. While limited and subject to change, this report leads to a final report.

The final report will include a comprehensive analysis of trends in youth suicide and related behaviors countywide, and data permitting, in cities and school districts. It will also include an examination of the degree to which recent media coverage of youth suicides in the county met safe reporting guidelines for suicides, and a comparison of youth suicide prevention activities to evidence-based recommendations. The final report is likely to include additional recommendations regarding suicide prevention strategies at the school, city, and county level.

It is important to note that Epi-Aids are designed to provide short-term assistance for urgent public health problems and are not research. For this reason, this Epi-Aid is using and analyzing only existing quantitative datasets and will not be collecting new data. It will provide an important baseline description of the patterns of youth suicide in the county. This approach means that the Epi-Aid will answer some, but not all, possible questions about suicide and suicidal behaviors in our community. When questions come up that the Epi-Aid is not designed to answer, we will work with community partners on these issues and connect them with others, such as researchers, who may be able to address these questions through additional analyses or new data collection.

One of the first steps in reducing the stigma around depression and other mental health issues, including what may lead to a suicide, is to know the facts. This preliminary report begins to provide the facts about youth suicide in Santa Clara County. Individuals, schools, community organizations, businesses and government organizations, as well as the news media, all have a role to play in reducing stigma and preventing suicide in our community.

Suicide is preventable. Anyone thinking about suicide can get help immediately by calling **1 (855) 278-4204**.

[Click here for the full Epi-Aid preliminary report on youth suicide in Santa Clara County.](#)

[For more information, please visit our Epi-Aid webpage by clicking here.](#)

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