



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Learn how to prevent suicides during National Suicide Prevention Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 15-24 nationally, and it is the 10th leading cause of death among all persons. In 2011, there were 640 deaths by suicide in Alabama (a rate of 13.3 per 100,000 people), and the state ranked 28th in the nation in suicide deaths. Alabama's ranking in comparison with other states in 2012 is not yet known; however, suicide claimed the lives of 721 Alabamians, a rate of 15.0 per 100,000 people.

Almost five times as many males as females died by suicide in Alabama, and there were approximately six times as many whites as those of other races who died by suicide. Suicide occurs across all economic, social and age boundaries.

The theme of National Suicide Prevention Week, Sept. 8-14, is "Suicide Prevention: One World Connected." That is because risk factors for suicide remain essentially the same from country to country. Mental illness, substance abuse, previous suicide attempts, hopelessness, access to lethal means, recent loss of loved ones, unemployment and vulnerability to self-harm are just a few examples of risk factors.

Factors that provide a buffer against suicide and suicidal behaviors are also the same in all corners of the world. High self-esteem, social connectedness, problem-solving skills, and supportive family and friends are all examples.

"By working together to increase awareness about suicide, educate communities and community members about how to prevent suicide, and promote and implement suicide prevention practices in youth-serving and behavioral health systems, we can prevent individuals from becoming suicidal and ultimately prevent people from dying by suicide," said Brandi Pouncey, manager of the Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Program, Alabama Department of Public Health. "Most suicidal people desperately want to live; they are just unable to come up with ways to cope with their struggles."

Be aware of the warning signs of suicide and seek help for yourself or someone you care about **as soon as possible** by contacting a community mental health professional or agency, a school counselor or psychologist, a suicide prevention/crisis intervention center, a private therapist, a family physician, a religious/spiritual leader, or by calling 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) for a referral should you witness, hear or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of the following:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking

- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

Seek help **immediately** should you witness, hear, or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of the following:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking about wanting to hurt or kill him/herself
- Someone looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person

There is no single solution to suicide prevention, but the following are ways to be helpful to someone who is threatening suicide.

1. Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
2. Ask if he/she is thinking about suicide.
3. Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
4. Be willing to listen. Allow for expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
5. Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
6. Don't dare him/her to do it.
7. Don't ask "why." This encourages defensiveness.
8. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
9. Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
10. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
11. Offer hope that alternatives are available.

Suicide is a major preventable cause of death on a global level and there is help for people contemplating suicide. There are ways for one to learn about the warning signs, how to ask the question, and how to refer someone for help through QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) Training. QPR training is free to groups and concerned citizens across Alabama.

Resource information is available at <http://www.adph.org/injuryprevention/Default.asp?id=1024>.