

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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The Warning Signs of Suicide

Did you know that Sept. 10 is World Suicide Awareness Day?

Warning signs

It is hard to know if a person is thinking about suicide. But you can look for warning signs and events that may make suicide more likely.

People may be more likely to attempt suicide if they:

- Are male.
- Have attempted suicide before, or have had a family member who has killed themselves or who attempted suicide.
- Have had or have mental health problems such as severe depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or anxiety.
- Have been through family violence, including physical or sexual abuse.
- Drink a lot of alcohol or use drugs.
- Are veterans or are members of the armed services.

Events that may put people at greater risk for suicide include:

- Changes in life such as the death of a partner or good friend, retirement, divorce, or problems with money.
- The diagnosis of a serious physical illness, such as cancer or heart disease, or a new physical disability.
- Severe and long-lasting pain.

- Loss of independence or not being able to get around without help.
- Living alone or not having friends or social contacts.

Adults who are at risk may show these warning signs of suicide. They may:

- Plan to or say they want to hurt or kill themselves or someone else.
- Talk, write, read, or draw about death, including writing suicide notes and talking about items that can cause physical harm, such as pills, guns, or knives.
- Say they have no hope, they feel trapped, or there is no point in "going on."
- Buy guns or bullets, stockpile medicines, or take other action to prepare for a suicide attempt. They may have a new interest in guns or other weapons.
- Drink more alcohol or use drugs, including prescription medicines.
- No longer want to see people and want to be alone a lot.
- No longer take care of themselves or follow medical advice.
- Give away their things and/or hurry to complete a will.

Warning signs in children, teens and young adults may be different. They include running away from home or doing risky or dangerous things, such as drunk driving.

Take any mention of suicide seriously.

If someone you know is threatening suicide, get help right away. Health professionals should try to find out whether the person:

- Has the means (weapons or medicines) available to do harm to themselves or to another person.
- Has set a time and place to attempt suicide.
- Thinks that there is no other way to end the pain.

If a suicide threat seems real, with a specific plan and the means at hand:

- Call **911**, a suicide hotline, or the police.
- Stay with the person, or ask someone you trust to stay with the person, until the crisis has passed.
- Encourage the person to seek professional help.
- Don't argue with the person ("It's not as bad as you think") or challenge the person ("You're not the type to attempt suicide").
- Tell the person that you don't want him or her to die. Talk about the situation as openly as possible.
- You can take steps to prevent a suicide attempt. Be willing to listen, and help the person find help. Don't be afraid to ask "What is the matter?" or bring up the subject of suicide. There is no evidence that talking about suicide leads to suicidal thinking or suicide.



Remove all guns from the home, or lock guns and bullets up in different places. Get rid of any prescription and non-prescription medicines that are not being used.

Help and support is available 24/7

- Call **Health Link** at 811 or the **Mental Health Help Line** at 1-877-303-2642, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Text and online chat options are available for **all Alberta youth** through **Calgary ConnecTeen**, Monday-Friday 3 pm-10 pm and Saturday, Sunday noon-10 pm. Visit calgaryconnecteen.com or text 587-333-2724.
- The federal **First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line** at 1-855-242-3310 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Clients can also access an online chat at www.hopeforwellness.ca.
- Support is also available for caretakers because caring for people who are at risk for suicide can take its toll. Caretakers can reach out for help by calling **Health Link** at 811 or the **Mental Health Help Line** at 1-877-303-2642.

It's important to heal after a loss. Get emotional support and practical help.

- Help is available for survivors after a death by suicide. The aftermath of a suicide can be particularly devastating for those left behind - family and friends, co-workers, team and school mates, treating clinicians and fellow patients or clients. Ask your family doctor or call Health Link at 811.