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Youth Suicide Risk Due to Overdose Rises During School Year

Illinois Poison Center Offers Parents & Caregivers Suicide Prevention Resources, Ways to Mitigate Risk During Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

CHICAGO – Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, and the 3rd leading cause of death among youth ages 10-19 in Illinois. September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. With the school year underway for Illinois students, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) is offering tips to teachers, parents, and caregivers to help prevent suicide attempts.

“Suicide attempts by overdose rise during the back-to-school period and throughout the school year,” said IPC Medical Director Michael Wahl, M.D. “For some students, going back to school appears to trigger stress and anxiety, making it even more important that teachers, parents and caregivers are on the lookout for behavioral changes.”

According to the latest Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) data, 186 Illinois youth and young adults died by suicide in 2022; over 9% of these deaths were from intentional self-poisonings.

A 2023 study published in the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control’s [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) examined trends in suspected suicide attempts by self-poisoning among persons aged 10-19 before and during the pandemic. Data showed that the rate of suspected suicide attempts by self-poisoning among persons aged 10 - 19 years increased 30% in 2021 as compared with pre-pandemic rates (2019), with a 73% increase among children aged 10 - 12 years. Approximately 49% were among adolescents aged 13 - 15 years, and 37% among females. Middle school and the first two years of high school showed the largest increases in suicide attempts reported to poison centers.

Studies also show that suicidal overdose attempts in children and teenagers increase while school is in session. A study published in [Clinical Toxicology](#) concluded there was a significant increase in the number of suicide attempts by self-poisoning cases in age groups of 10-18 years during the traditional school months of September-May compared with June-August.

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“Back to school is an exciting time for many students, but peer pressure, bullying, and academic expectations can lead to symptoms of depression or anxiety,” said IPC Assistant Vice President Carol DesLauriers, Pharm.D. “IPC is here to help and encourages you to access the resources available to keep the loved ones in your life happy and healthy.”

As suicide continues to be a growing public health problem, IPC is sharing the following resources to help prevent suicide and how to look for warning signs:

- Take all threats seriously. Signs that children and adolescents may be thinking of suicide could include sadness (with or without crying), anxiety, lack of energy and/or motivation, temper outbursts and/or violent episode, withdrawal from friends and family, skipping school or classes, increased use of drugs and/or alcohol, comments about death or dying, or even threatening suicide. A list of warning signs can be found [here](#).
- A guide titled, [Illinois' Youth Resources for Mental Health, Well-Being and Resilience](#), developed by the Illinois Health and Hospital Association's (IHA) Behavioral Health Advisory Forum is available on the IHA website along with other relevant [resources](#). A Spanish version of the guide can be found [here](#).
- Call [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) for 24/7, free and confidential support for anyone experiencing thoughts of suicide or experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, including family, friends, and/or caregivers. Callers will receive specialized, individualized support from certified crisis workers trained in suicide prevention, de-escalation and stabilization, and resources. Text 988 to chat with a crisis counselor or access the chat at [988lifeline.org/chat/](#).
- To specifically address the suicide crisis among young people, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued [recommendations](#) in 2022 for pediatric health providers to screen everyone ages 12 and older for suicide risk at least once a year.
- To access information from IDPH about suicide prevention, click [here](#).

IPC's toxicology specialists provided consultations to hospital staff for almost 12,000 suicidal overdoses (all ages) in 2022. IPC staff serve as toxicology consultants to Illinois healthcare professionals, whose inquiries represent nearly one-third of yearly poisoning cases reported to IPC. Calls to the IPC helpline (1-800-222-1222) are free and confidential. IPC experts are available to provide information and treatment advice 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, including holidays.

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The Illinois Poison Center is a nonprofit health service that provides the people of Illinois with comprehensive and trusted information and treatment advice on potentially harmful substances via a free, confidential 24-hour helpline staffed by specially trained physicians, nurses, and pharmacists.