

Epi-Aid on Youth Suicide in Santa Clara County, CA

Overview and Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Epi-Aid?

- An Epi-Aid is an investigation of an urgent public health problem. Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers (EISOs) and subject matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) assist state and local public health officials in these investigations.
- The focus of Epi-Aids is to try to determine the cause(s) and/or extent of a specific health problem and to develop prevention and control recommendations.
- An Epi-Aid investigating youth suicide takes a public health approach, focused on identifying ways to reduce people's risk for suicidal behavior by addressing factors at the individual, family, community, and society levels. This approach aims to track trends and identify risk and protective factors.

How was the Epi-Aid on youth suicide in Santa Clara County initiated?

- From 2009 through 2015, there were a number of suicides among incoming, current, or alumni members in one school district in Palo Alto, in Santa Clara County. In response, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) requested urgent epidemiological assistance from the CDC to understand youth suicide in Santa Clara County, and, data permitting, in the affected cities and school districts.
- The CDC, in partnership with SAMHSA, is providing this assistance to the CDPH and the Santa Clara County Public Health Department (SCCPHD) through conducting an Epi-Aid investigation.

What are the objectives of this Epi-Aid?

- Characterize the epidemiology of, and trends in, fatal and non-fatal suicidal behaviors among youth occurring from 2008 through 2015 in Santa Clara County, California.¹
 - Data permitting, compare characteristics at multiple levels, such as school districts and cities.
- Examine the degree to which media coverage of youth suicides occurring from 2008 through 2015 in Santa Clara County, California, met safe reporting guidelines for suicides.
- Inventory and compare youth suicide prevention policies, activities, and protocols used in the community to evidence-based and national recommendations.
- Synthesize information from objectives 1-3 to make recommendations on youth suicide prevention strategies that can be used at the school, city, and county level.

¹ Epidemiological investigations usually have the objective of describing patterns and trends related to a disease in a population and examining associations between the disease and various determinants.

How long will this Epi-Aid last?

- Epi-Aids provide short-term assistance for urgent public health problems.
- There are three parts, which altogether can span several months: 1) preparation, 2) field work (when the CDC/SAMSHA team came to Santa Clara County and Palo Alto), and 3) follow-up (continued analyses at the CDC/SAMSHA offices).
- The dates for field work for this Epi-Aid were February 15 through February 29, 2016.

What data sources are being used in the investigation?

- The purpose of an Epi-Aid is to utilize existing data to develop specific prevention and control recommendations.
- As this Epi-Aid focuses on youth suicide in Santa Clara County, data sources are generally specific to Santa Clara County, and are as comprehensive as possible given the short-term nature of this investigative method. For the investigation, SCCPHD has given the CDC/SAMHSA team access to existing data sources from Santa Clara County.
- SCCPHD has also provided existing data for nearby counties, such as San Mateo, that can be used to make cross-county comparisons.
- There is flexibility in what existing data sources can be included in the investigation. Community partners have also provided existing data for the investigation.

What is the role of the CDC/SAMHSA team on this Epi-Aid?

- SCCPHD and the CDC/SAMHSA are working in collaborative partnership to conduct this Epi-Aid. The CDC/SAMHSA team's role is to provide technical assistance and subject matter expertise, which will include analysis of available data and the development of prevention and control recommendations. These components are being carried out by Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers and subject matter experts from the CDC and SAMHSA.

What types of activities are being included in this Epi-Aid?

- Epi-Aid investigations utilize primarily an epidemiological approach. Epidemiological investigations usually have the objective of describing patterns and trends related to a disease in a population and examining associations between the disease and various determinants.
- This Epi-Aid is using existing quantitative datasets, such as vital statistics, emergency department and hospital data, and school survey data.
- Activities in this Epi-Aid include 1) a description of fatal and non-fatal suicide behavior among youth, including describing trends over time and identifying risk and protective factors 2) a media scan to examine the degree to which media coverage met safe reporting guidelines for suicides and 3) informal meetings with community organizations and groups to discuss suicide prevention strategies being implemented at the county and local levels.
- For each data source, we are attempting to compare Palo Alto to other cities within the county. The extent to which we will be able to do so depends on the data available.

Information provided by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department.

What types of activities will not be part of this Epi-Aid?

- Epi-Aids primarily use epidemiologic methods. For this Epi-Aid, the Epi-Aid team will not be collecting new data through surveys, conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups, or performing psychological autopsies.
- Because we are using a population-level approach we will not be able to provide information or details about individual suicide deaths.

What happens after an Epi-Aid? / What are the products of an Epi-Aid?

- The Epi-Aid team are preparing a brief, preliminary report on the investigation and then will prepare a comprehensive report including final findings and recommendations. The CDC/SAMHSA team will take the lead in preparing the reports, with SCCPHD providing feedback, comments, and suggestions based on discussions with community stakeholders along the way.
- SCCPHD, working with community stakeholders, will decide how these reports are used and disseminated. SCCPHD expects that the preliminary report will be released in early to mid- June; this estimate is subject to change.