

Briefing: Covid-19, mental health and suicide prevention

In advance of tomorrow's Health and Sport Committee portfolio questions, we wanted to share the latest insights on the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on suicide prevention and mental health.

Impact on mental health & wellbeing

- Since lockdown began, Samaritans has provided emotional support more than 1 million times by phone, email and letter. Around 1 in 4 mention Covid-19 as an explicit concern but our volunteers tell us the situation is affecting all callers in some way. Find out more [here](#).
- During the [first 3 months of lockdown](#) our volunteers reported heightened levels of anxiety among callers. Common caller concerns during this period included challenges with mental health, feelings of loneliness and isolation, worries about family & relationships and worries about finance and employment.
- Based on existing and emerging evidence we're particularly concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on [young people](#), [middle-aged men](#) and [people with pre-existing mental health conditions](#).

Implications for suicide prevention

- While it is too early to know how the current situation will affect suicide rates, there is some evidence Covid-19 has exacerbated [known risk factors](#) for suicide.
- [New research conducted by Glasgow University](#) in partnership with Samaritans and SAMH shows suicidal ideation increased slightly during the first 6 weeks among UK adults (rising from 8.2% to 9.8%). This increase was more pronounced among younger adults aged 18-29 (rising from 12.5%-14.4%).
- The same study found that younger adults, people with pre-existing mental health conditions and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to experience worse mental health outcomes during this period.

How Samaritans is supporting suicide prevention locally and nationally?

- Samaritans' free helpline has remained open, 24 hours a day since lockdown began, thanks to the dedication of our volunteers.
- We've developed new online resources including our [free self-help app](#) and guides on [how to support others](#) with their mental health.
- We're continuing some of our community activities online including our [postvention service](#) to support schools, colleges and universities following a suicide, our work to support mental health [in prisons](#) and our [workplace training and support resources](#).

How can policy & services support suicide prevention & mental health in light of Covid-19?

It's important to recognise that a rise in suicide is **not** inevitable and there are steps we can all take to reduce risk and strengthen support including:

- Raising awareness of how people can look after their mental health and where to turn for support through a whole-population approach
- Targeting specific support for groups who evidence suggests are at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes, including people with pre-existing mental health conditions, people experiencing - or at risk of - job loss and poverty, and young people.
- Working with the third sector, voluntary and community organisations to ensure they are able to respond and adapt to local needs and changing restrictions and can play an integral and sustainable role in responding to the current crisis and supporting recovery.

For further information and support:

If you would like further information contact m.gordon@samaritans.org