



Suicide among adolescents and young adults on the rise in the Americas: PAHO warns of urgent need for prevention

More than 18,000 young people aged 10 to 24 died by suicide in the region in 2021; the rate increased by 38% over 21 years, with faster rises among girls and children aged 10 to 14.

Washington, DC., 20 May 2026 (PAHO) – Suicide among adolescents and young adults in the Americas has increased over the past two decades and remains the third cause of death among individuals aged 10 to 24, according to a new study published in The Lancet Regional Health – Americas.

In 2021, 18,157 adolescents and young people died by suicide in the region. While three out of every four suicide deaths occurred among males, the increase has been faster among females. The sharpest rise was observed in the youngest age group, those aged 10 to 14 years, raising urgent public health concerns.

“The fact that the suicide rate among young people has risen 38% in just over two decades — compared to a 17% increase in the general population — is a wake-up call,” said Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Dr. Jarbas Barbosa. “We must strengthen prevention efforts, especially for children, adolescents, and young adults, and ensure they receive timely support.”

Multiple preventable factors driving the increase

The article highlights several factors that may be associated with this increase, including mental health conditions (such as depression and anxiety appearing at younger ages), substance use, excessive exposure to digital environments and cyberbullying, social pressures, and easy access to lethal means.

Evidence also shows that many of these factors are preventable or treatable, especially when identified early.

“The increase in suicide mortality among younger populations calls for stronger early detection and interventions in schools and communities,” said Renato Oliveira e Souza, Chief of PAHO’s Mental Health and Substance Use Unit. “It is essential to continue expanding access to mental health services and strengthening measures aimed at restricting access to lethal means.”

Based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Health Estimates covering 35 countries between 2000 and 2021, the study found that the suicide mortality rate in this age group (10-24) rose from 5.7 to 7.84 deaths per 100,000 population, representing an average annual rise of 1.48%. Trends varied across countries and subregions, but the increase was widespread, with particularly high levels in North America and some Southern Cone countries.

The study, conducted by specialists from PAHO and the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University in New York, also underscores the importance of implementing school-based mental health promotion and socio-emotional skills programs, improving early identification and follow-up of people at risk, and promoting responsible media reporting on suicide.

Regional initiative to prevent suicide

Since 2000, the suicide mortality rate in the general population of the Americas has increased by more than 17%, making the region the only one in the world where this trend continues to rise.

In response, PAHO launched the Regional Suicide Prevention Initiative in 2025 to support countries in implementing evidence-based interventions. The initiative aims to strengthen national plans, expand access to mental health services, and reduce stigma around mental health and suicide.

“Suicide affects families, communities, and entire societies, and is preventable,” Dr. Barbosa added. “With political commitment, investment, and collaboration across sectors, we can save lives.”

Links

[Suicide mortality among adolescents and young adults aged 10–24 years in the Americas, 2000–2021: an analysis using the WHO Global Health Estimates](#)

[Regional Suicide Prevention Initiative](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system (OAS).