

Facts About Mental Health and Suicide Among Veterinarians

In the United States, nearly 50,000 Americans die by suicide each year, making suicide the 10th leading cause of death.¹ Suicide affects every demographic and occupational group, but some groups may be at higher risk than others. Research has shown that the suicide rate among veterinarians is higher than that of the general population.^{2,3} Other facts include:

- Male veterinarians and female veterinarians (OR 1.6 and 2.4, respectively) and male and female veterinarian technologists (OR 5.0 and 2.3, respectively) are more likely than the general US population to die by suicide.³ The suicide rates among male and female veterinary assistants or laboratory animal caretakers are not higher than the general US population.³
- Veterinarians who die by suicide are significantly less likely than veterinary technicians and technologists to have a history of a suicide attempt.³
- Pharmaceutical poisoning is the most common method of death among veterinarians.^{2,3} One study found that when veterinarians who died from pentobarbital poisoning were excluded from the analysis, the suicide rate among veterinarians, but not veterinary technicians or techologists, did not differ significantly from the general US population.³
- A 2019 analysis of suicides among veterinary professionals and veterinary students found that nearly 30 percent of all decedents had disclosed their suicidal intent, 55 percent had a history of mental health treatment, and 42 percent were undergoing mental health or substance abuse treatment at their time of death.³
- A 2014 convenience sample survey of 11,627 US veterinarians found 9 percent had current serious psychological distress, 31 percent had experienced depressive episodes, and 17 percent had experienced suicidal ideation since leaving veterinary school; each of these is a risk factor for suicide and each was more prevalent than in the general population.⁴
- Suicide is considered a complex health outcome generally caused by the convergence of multiple risk factors, the most common being untreated or inadequately managed mental health conditions, and access to (and knowledge regarding) lethal means.

Suicide statistics are released each year from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Learn more at afsp.org/statistics.

References

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3. Witte T.K., Spitzer E.G., Edwards N., Fowler K.A., & Nett R.J. (2019). Suicides and deaths of undetermined intent among veterinary professionals from 2003 through 2014. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 255(5), 595-608. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.255.5.595>.
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