

Smith Avenue Bridge

Suicide Prevention

Minnesota's prevention efforts are based on the evidence that most suicides are preventable, mental illness is treatable and recovery is possible. MDH works with communities to build capacity to implement a comprehensive, public health approach to promote health, wellness and connectedness in the community while implementing evidence-based, community-specific prevention strategies.

Contagion

Contagion describes the process by which one suicide death can contribute to other suicide deaths or behaviors. Contagion accounts for only 1-5% of all suicides annually, but can account for a larger percentage of suicide deaths in a community or school setting during a particular period of time.

Smith Avenue Bridge Suicide Prevention Initiatives

Bridge Barriers

Research shows that **bridge barriers are effective** at decreasing jump-related suicides. They have found that once barriers are up, people do not go to a nearby bridge without a barrier. In addition, people most

often do not switch means, meaning they do not use pills or a firearm instead.

- MDH, MNDOT, suicide prevention nonprofit organizations, and surrounding communities have been working on incorporating barriers in future bridge re-decking projects.

Community Connectedness

Positive and supportive relationships and community connections can help people buffer life stressors and are an important components of preventing suicidal behavior.

- Community members have scheduled monthly walks and related activities on or near the Smith Avenue Bridge and have developed an online presence to promote community engagement, conversations and prevent activities.

Safe Media Reporting

Research shows that **unsafe messaging about suicide can normalize suicidal behavior** and may increase suicidal behavior among people already at increased risk. The way the media reports on suicide can either decrease or increase suicide risk in a community.

- MDH, SAVE and community members have been educating the media on safe reporting of suicide - www.reportingonsuicide.org

Gatekeeper Training

Identifying people at risk for suicide and connecting them with treatment and services is an effective intervention to prevent suicide deaths. Most people who consider suicide don't want to die, but feel hopeless and may want to escape their current situation and pain. The more people who know the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond can increase the number of people who are able to intervene and prevent suicide deaths.

- MDH funds several nonprofit organizations to provide suicide prevention gatekeeper trainings to schools, businesses and communities.

Discourage Physical Memorials

Physical memorials are discouraged after a suicide - especially at the place of death - because they may contribute to contagion. Physical memorials and repeated memorial events can reinforce the suicidal act or suicidal thought among persons at increased risk for suicide or with suicidal ideation.

- Memorial ribbons were removed from the Smith Avenue Bridge in early 2016 at the recommendation of suicide prevention professionals.

Prevention Efforts Effective

So far in 2016 there have not been any suicide deaths from Smith Avenue Bridge. In 2015, there were seven suicides from the Smith Avenue Bridge. There appeared to be suicide contagion. Prior to 2015, there have been zero to one suicide deaths each year from the Smith Avenue Bridge.

Minnesota Suicide Data

Fall-related suicides (such as from a bridge) account for approximately 2% of suicides.

Suicide continues to be a serious public health concern in Minnesota. Over the last decade suicide rates have increased. In 2015, there were 726 suicides.

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