

Suicide Screening Guide for Primary Care Physicians

Quick Stats

The CDC reports that in 2023 suicide was the second leading cause of death for ages 10–34 in the U.S.

- For adolescents 15–19, suicide ranks among the **top three causes of death**.
- **Females** present a higher suicide risk than males (30% females had ideation vs. 14% of boys; 13% attempted vs. 7% of boys)
- 41% of **LGBTQ+** teens seriously considered suicide, 32% made a plan, and 20% attempted suicide—figures significantly higher than those for their cisgender, heterosexual peers (13%, 11%, and 6%, respectively).
- Amongst racial/ethnic groups, **Native Americans** have the highest suicide rate,.
- **Rural Youth** - Suicide rates in rural areas are nearly twice as high as in urban areas.

Screening recommendations:

Preventative / Universal Screening

If you are a Nevada PCP, we recommend that you **annually screen *all patients ages 12+ years for suicide risk during preventive service visits**, using a validated suicide risk screening tool such as the [NIMH's Suicide Risk Screening Tool](#) provided as part of their [ASQ toolkit](#).

[The AAP cautions](#) that administering a suicide screen only when a patient screens positive for depression is not sufficient as not all youths at risk for suicide have depressive symptoms. **The AAP recommends using the ASQ in tandem with the PHQ-9A as part of an annual screen.**

Immediate Risk

Use a risk assessment such as the [NIMH's Suicide Risk Screening Tool](#) and use appropriate clinical response (not screening, see next page) when a patient presents with expressed suicidal ideation, behaviors, or concern.

Risk assessment using the ASQ ([click here for the C-SSRS](#))

Low Risk

Characterized by

- Thoughts of death with no plan, intent or suicidal behavior.
- Strong protective factors with few or modifiable risk factors.

Moderate Risk

Characterized by

- Suicidal ideations with a plan, but no intent or behavior.
- Multiple risk factors present.

High Risk

Characterized by

- Suicide attempt or persistent ideation with intent.
- Multiple risk factors. No protective factors, or protective factors are not currently relevant.

Clinical Response

- Referrals
- Emergency/Crisis #'s
- Symptom reduction
- Education

Clinical Response

- Hospital Admission may be necessary
- Safety / Crisis Plan
- Lethal Means Counseling
- Risk Reduction
- Emergency/Crisis #'s

Clinical Response

- Hospital Admission
- Suicide Precautions
- Observation

Clinical pearl: Being prepared beforehand is critical. Be sure to learn the warning signs of suicide and develop office protocols to implement in the case of an emergency.

[The Brown-Stanley Safety plan](#) is a brief intervention to help those experiencing self-harm and suicidal thoughts with a concrete way to mitigate risk and increase safety.

Be sure to assess if the patient has access to firearms or other lethal means.

If you want further training SPRC offers [free online self-paced courses](#).

Terminology:

Non-suicidal Self-Injurious Behavior (NSSI) (also known as self-harm): Self-directed, deliberate behavior resulting in injury or potential injury to oneself. No evidence implicit or explicit of suicidal intent. Some kids use NSSI as a way to reduce stress or as self punishment, however not with intentions of killing themselves. It is important to distinguish NSSI from suicidal behavior.

Other suicidal behavior and preparatory acts: Preparation or acts purposed toward making suicide attempt. For example buying a gun, or leaving suicide good bye note.

Suicide attempt: An act of self injury with at least some intent to die as a result. There does not need to be injury or harm, just the potential of such.

Interrupted suicide attempt: A person attempts to end their life, but is stopped by someone, or something else.

Aborted suicide attempt: The person takes steps to kill themselves, but then stops.

Useful Links

1. [NV PAL Suicide Screening guide for Nevada Clinicians](#)
2. [988 Lifeline](#) - (call/text 988 or chat via 988lifeline.org)
3. [SAMHSA's 2025 Suicide Prevention Awareness Month Toolkit](#)
4. [Zero Suicide online courses](#)
5. [Suicide Prevention Resource Center \(SPRC\) online courses](#)



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