



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Alcohol and Risk of Suicide

Suicide and Alcohol Among Racial/Ethnic Populations — 17 States, United States, 2005–2006

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Each year in the U.S., more than 30,000 people die of suicide. During a recent two-year period, alcohol was a factor in approximately 4,400 suicide deaths in 17 U.S. states.

Dr. Alexander Crosby is a medical epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Violence Prevention. He's joining us today to discuss the link between alcohol use and suicide. Welcome to the show, Alex.

[Dr. Crosby] Thank you very much.

[Dr. Gaynes] Alex, is alcohol use, related to suicide, more common in any particular age, sex, or racial/ethnic group?

[Dr. Crosby] What our study found is that alcohol was connected to suicide across a variety of different groups, but when we started to look within certain populations, we did find that males had a higher percentage than females, young and middle-aged adults had a higher number than elderly adults, and that American Indians and Alaska Natives were higher than other racial and ethnic groups.

[Dr. Gaynes] So are people drinking themselves to death or does drinking lead to other forms of suicide?

[Dr. Crosby] Alcohol is connected to suicide in a number of different ways. Alcohol can be in various forms, such as alcoholism, alcohol dependence, or binge drinking. So it's not always someone that has an identified alcohol problem, but it can be someone that uses alcohol just prior to the suicide event to build up their courage or it's connected with some other underlying problems that they have.

[Dr. Gaynes] How do the affects of alcohol lead to suicide?

[Dr. Crosby] Alcohol has a number of different effects on the nervous system and especially in regards to disinhibition in the brain, and so it can sometimes cause a person to take action on something that normally they would not have done.

[Dr. Gaynes] Alex, what should a person do if he or she is having suicidal thoughts?

[Dr. Crosby] One thing is to take that very seriously; it's not something to be ignored. Avoid alcohol and then seek help, either through a local healthcare provider or a person's own healthcare provider or they can call the National Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK. And oftentimes, there are also other local facilities available, such as the local county health department.

[Dr. Gaynes] Alex, where can listeners get more information about the link between alcohol use and suicide?

[Dr. Crosby] One place to get more information is at the website www.hhs.gov and enter the search term "alcohol and risk of suicide." That'll be a good source for additional information.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks Alex. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Alexander Crosby about the link between alcohol use and suicide.

Remember, many factors can lead to suicide, but alcohol can increase depression and hopelessness. If you are having suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately from a trusted healthcare provider or counselor or call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.