

Study finds no rise in English suicide rates during first lockdown

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Suicide rates in England did not rise following the first national lockdown in 2020 despite higher levels of greater distress, University of Manchester researchers have found.

However, they stress the need to continue monitoring figures and to maintain [suicide](#) prevention measures.

The study, published in *The Lancet Regional Health—Europe* today, provides evidence contrary to widely reported concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to an increase in suicides.

The team used data from English Real Time Surveillance (RTS) systems in areas covering a total population of around 13 million—a quarter of the population.

RTS anonymously records suspected suicides as they occur, allowing early monitoring of figures, before an inquest is held.

Several areas of England have already established RTS; their figures were combined by the

researchers to give overall numbers and rates.

According to the figures, there were 121.3 suicides per month between April and October 2020, after the first lockdown began. This compares to a slightly higher rate of 125.7 per month between January and March 2020.

The team are the first researchers to use RTS in this way, though further development is needed before it can provide the full national picture.

Study author Louis Appleby is Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH) at The University of Manchester.

He said: "We didn't find an increase in [suicide rates](#) in England in the months post-lockdown, although we know from surveys and calls to charities that the pandemic has made our [mental health](#) worse.

"To be clear, no suicide rate—whether high or low, rising or falling—is acceptable, and our conclusions at this stage need to be cautious as these early findings may change.

"There may still be variations between demographic groups or geographical areas. After all, the impact of COVID-19 itself has not been uniform across communities."

Study author Nav Kapur, Professor of Psychiatry and Population Health at The University of Manchester said: "How can we square our finding that suicide rates have not risen despite greater reported distress?

"Suicide is complex, and rates do not simply follow levels of mental disorder. There may be a genuine social cohesion effect at the time of external crises—we've seen this in data from suicide rates around the time of the two world wars, suicide rates decreased and there is this idea that societies pull

together when there's an external threat."

Study author Dr. Pauline Turnbull, Project Director of NCISH at The University of Manchester said:
"While our findings show that suicide didn't rise in England post-lockdown as many feared it might, we do need to be aware that it's too early to see some of the longer-term impacts of the pandemic, such as ongoing economic adversity. It is essential that we maintain a focus on suicide prevention."

More information: Suicide in England in the COVID-19 pandemic: Early observational data from real time surveillance. *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*.

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