Northern Arizona AHEC Scholars:
COVID-19 and Impacts on Rural Mental Health Crisis in Adolescents in Coconino County, Arizona

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Suicide in the United States¹

Past Year Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors Among U.S. Adults (2019)

Data Courtesy of SAMHSA

- 12.0 million adults had serious thoughts of suicide
- 3.5 million adults made suicide plans
- 1.4 million adults attempted suicide
- 1.2 million adults made plans and attempted suicide
- 217,000 adults made no plans and attempted suicide
Adolescent Suicide

**Suicide** is a leading cause of death in adolescents, only following unintentional injury.

**Highest risks groups include:**¹
- Male individuals
- Native American or White
- Limited social support
Adolescent Suicide

Arizona continues to have suicide rates higher than the national average.¹
Suicide in Coconino County

- Suicide rates are **higher** in Coconino County than the Arizona average\(^2\)
- On average one person in Coconino County commits suicide **every 2 weeks**\(^2\)
COVID-19 Cases in Coconino County⁴

Population: 143,476
62,518 tested
13.7% positive tests
8,320 cases
182 deaths

COVID-19 Cases by Age Group

- Less than 20 years: 1,253
- 20 - 44 years: 3,178
- 45 - 54 years: 737
- 55 - 64 years: 603
- 65 years and older: 547
COVID-19 Cases in Coconino County

COVID-19 Situation Summary

Location:

COVID-19 Cases by Geographic Area

Flagstaff Unified
Tuba City Unified
Page Unified
Coconino County Accommodation
Flagstaff Charter
COVID-19 impact on vulnerable populations

The pandemic has impacted those with pre-existing inequities, especially among racial/ethnic minorities:⁶

- access to reliable internet
- inadequate technology hardware

The digital divide was restricted some patients from telehealth services⁷

The lack of reliable technological resources has increased stress and anxiety levels for students of all ages⁸
COVID-19 effect on Health Status

- Uncovered a lack of specialized mental health services creating inadequate care for:
  - Depression and suicidal ideation
  - Tobacco, alcohol, drug use
Those in need of mental health services in Coconino County don’t have easy access:

“Mental health if you have AHCCCS, you have some access. If you don’t have AHCCCS you don’t have access.”"
Pre-pandemic, **11.5%** of the Coconino County population **did not have health insurance**[^9].

Of the uninsured in Coconino County, **9% of the children** do not have health insurance[^10].

In Coconino County, **19% of COVID-19 cases have been patients under the age of 20**[^11].
## 2020 COVID-19 Closure Timeline in Coconino County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 16th</td>
<td>Closed: restaurants, food courts, cafes, coffeehouses, retail food facilities, and other similar businesses can’t serve food and beverages for consumption on sight. Theaters, cinemas, indoor and outdoor performance venues. Libraries, museums. Gyms, fitness centers, recreation centers. Bingo halls, bowling alleys, indoor climbing facilities, skating rinks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 26th</td>
<td>Previous closures extended until April 1st. Expanded to hair salons, nail salons, beauty parlors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8th</td>
<td>Park Amenity Closures. Dog parks, tennis courts, skate parks, bmx parks.</td>
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<td>May 4th</td>
<td>Cosmetologists and barber shops to re-open. Restaurants and coffee shops can start dine in services with physical distancing measures on May 11th.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>Pause operations of bars, gyms, movie theatres, waterparks, tubing rentals. Restaurants with indoor seatings can operate at 50% or less capacity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 9</td>
<td>Bars, gyms, and theatres allowed to reopen if they come up with a plan that has measures they are taking to stay safe and healthy. Essential services remain in-person. Special events with a limit of 10. Parks and outdoor amenities stay open.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 24th</td>
<td>Some restaurants are closing due to difficulties with COVID and shutdowns. Return to Phase 2 of Covid-19 Reentry Plan. Re-close: Community libraries, City Hall. Essential services remain in-person.</td>
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Changes in Available Resources for Adolescents
Changes in academics and technology access:
Flagstaff Unified School District transitioned online¹
Flagstaff library closed¹⁶

Changes in social support programs:
Change in distribution of school lunch¹⁵
Changes in recreational activities:

High school sports cancelled

Flagstaff Boys and Girls Club,¹⁷ Big Brothers Big Sister of Flagstaff¹⁸ transitioned online

Park closures¹⁹

Changes in mental health resources:

The Guidance Center (community mental health center) expanded resources to include telemedicine care²⁰
Mental Health Concerns and COVID-19
Mental Health & Stressors

During the COVID-19 pandemic, *rates of mental illness have increased*²¹

*Increased stressors including:*²² ²³
- Unemployment
- Worsening food insecurity
- Social isolation
- Loss of support systems and loss of loved ones
Interpersonal Interactions

COVID-19 has changed interpersonal interaction due to social distancing resulting in:²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶

**Increased** suicidal ideation

**Increased** emergency department visits due to mental health concerns
Responses to Mental Health Concerns and COVID-19
COVID-19 has further exacerbated a public health emergency²⁵
Behavioral Health Task Force was formed in collaboration with the Arizona Department of Health Services and AHCCCS in March 2020.

- Including behavioral health providers, health insurers, public health, and provider and medical associations
- Implementation of the Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) in June 2020
- Implementation of the and the Physician Peer Mentoring Program in October 2020
Responses to Mental Health Concerns and COVID-19

Coconino County has expanded telemedicine based mental health community care.

Implemented virtual activities for peer interaction among adolescents.

Expanded resources for homeschooling, online learning support.
Resources for Adolescents

- Stronger as One Coalition
  - Virtual Meetings
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Wandering for Wellness program
- Re-opening of public parks, facilities
- Expanding distance based recreational activities
- Telemedicine based mental health care
Next Steps

- Increase awareness about mental health resources
- Encourage at-risk groups, especially adolescents, to discuss mental health concerns
- Recognize cultural norms that and social stigma play a role in seeking help
- Support available mental health resources in the local community
- Expand mental health resources including telemedicine and distance care
References

References


References


Comments or Questions?