

# **Youth suicide risk and preventive interventions: a review of the past 10 years.**

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## **Abstract**

**OBJECTIVE:** To review critically the past 10 years of research on youth suicide.

**METHOD:** Research literature on youth suicide was reviewed following a systematic search of PsycINFO and Medline. The search for school-based suicide prevention programs was expanded using two education databases: ERIC and Education Full Text. Finally, manual reviews of articles' reference lists identified additional studies. The review focuses on epidemiology, risk factors, prevention strategies, and treatment protocols.

**RESULTS:** There has been a dramatic decrease in the youth suicide rate during the past decade. Although a number of factors have been posited for the decline, one of the more plausible ones appears to be the increase in antidepressants being prescribed for adolescents during this period. Youth psychiatric disorder, a family history of suicide and psychopathology, stressful life events, and access to firearms are key risk factors for youth suicide. Exciting new findings have emerged on the biology of suicide in adults, but, while encouraging, these are yet to be replicated in youths. Promising prevention strategies, including school-based skills training for students, screening for at-risk youths, education of primary care physicians, media education, and lethal-means restriction, need continuing evaluation studies. Dialectical behavior therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and treatment with antidepressants have been identified as promising treatments but have not yet been tested in a randomized clinical trial of youth suicide. **CONCLUSIONS:** While tremendous strides have been made in our understanding of who is at risk for suicide, it is incumbent upon future research efforts to focus on the development and evaluation of empirically based suicide prevention and treatment protocols.