



## H29 Suicide Analysis in the Time of COVID-19 in Orange County, California

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how the COVID-19 (also called SARS-CoV-19 or Coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic affected suicide rates at a large coroner's office, specifically Orange County, CA.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting findings analyzing death by suicide in the jurisdiction during the COVID-19 pandemic and examine what role, if any, the pandemic played in people dying by suicide during the six months of the most restrictive lockdown that affected California beginning in March 2020.

There has been much publicity about the effects of the pandemic and the lockdown on the population and mental health.<sup>1,2</sup> Unfortunately, at this point in the crisis, any long-term effects on suicide rates and mental health cannot be fully understood, including financial stressors and future potential lockdowns; however, the information on those dying by suicide in this initial phase of the pandemic lockdown is available.

This presentation aims to examine one of the many indirect consequences of the pandemic on death rates at a medicolegal death investigation office, one that in addition to the burden of increased deaths directly attributed to the virus, adds significantly to the burdens on staff at all levels of the office along with other indirect pandemic deaths (such as accidental overdoses). This presentation will also briefly address other classifications of death during this time frame.

This presentation will include comparisons to suicide rates from the five prior years and will include analysis of investigation reports to determine if there was any direct mention of the pandemic by the victims, either to informants or via suicide note or other writings, as well as reviewing interviews with friends and family to see if they attributed the pandemic as a possible explanation of suicide, as well as any other factors mentioned. Analysis will be done on various age groups, races, and genders, and will also look at past medical history, marital status, and living situations. This presentation will examine the methods through which people are taking their lives in this timeframe as compared to the prior years and will also address toxicology findings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as a guideline for potential future resource allocation in times of pandemic, as well as serve a public health role for future evaluation to save lives should the nation again be faced with such challenges. This presentation can also be used by medicolegal death investigators to have heightened awareness of suicide rates during a pandemic.

### Reference(s):

1. Mayo Clinic Staff. COVID-19 and the risk of suicide. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6932a1\\_e&deliveryName=USCDC\\_921-DM35222#suggestedcitation](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_e&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM35222#suggestedcitation).
2. Czeisler, Mark, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, August 14, 2020, [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6932a1\\_e&deliveryName=USCDC\\_921-DM35222#suggestedcitation](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_e&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM35222#suggestedcitation).

### Suicide, COVID-19, Medicolegal Death Investigation