

# Youth suicide rates are rising. School and the Internet may be to blame.



A new study presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in May found that the number of children and teens admitted to children's hospitals for thoughts of suicide or self-harm have more than doubled during the last decade. The lead author on the study, Dr. Gregory Plemmons, is an associate professor at The Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Wochit

Stressful environments and unfettered access to information [may have boosted](#) the number of teens and children hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or actions.

A new study found that children's hospital admissions of patients 5 to 17 years old for such thoughts or actions more than doubled from 2008 to 2015. [The study looked at 32 hospitals using data from the Pediatric Health Information System \(PHIS\)](#)

When patients are hospitalized, doctors consider family history, worldview,

and social environments. School systems are becoming “more and more challenging,” said Dr. Dan Nelson of the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. Nelson, medical director of the center's child psychiatry unit, noted concerns about weapons and bullying.

News about the increased in suicide-related hospitalizations of children and teens comes amid an ongoing outbreak of youth suicide in Hamilton County, where Cincinnati is located.

In 2014, the county saw four suicides of people 18 and under. In 2015, there were five. In 2016, there were 13. So far this year, seven.

The most shocking was [the January death of 8-year-old Gabriel Taye](#), who killed himself two days after peers knocked him unconscious in a restroom at Cincinnati's Carson Elementary School. A security camera video shows other students touched and kicked Gabriel until an administrator arrived and roused him. A Cincinnati homicide detective described it as [bullying that bordered on criminal assault](#).

The study on hospitalizations from Vanderbilt University comes in the wake of a [national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report from November](#). The CDC found the suicide rate for children age 10 to 14 doubled from 2007 to 2014. Suicide overtook motor vehicle accidents as a cause of death in that age group, the report showed.

## **'A seasonality to suicide'**

The Vanderbilt study found that children’s hospitals saw higher rates of suicidal patients during the fall and the spring, but not during the summer.

“There is a seasonality to suicide,” said Dr. Gregory Plemmons, the lead author on the study. “If you look at adult data, most adults tend to commit suicide in summer and the spring, we noticed that our biggest time (for children) was in the fall.”

Plemmons, an associate professor at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt in Nashville, said he's seen the increase of young suicidal patients first-hand.

“We're definitely seeing it in our hospital,” he said. “We've actually had to hire extra people to support this population.”

In addition to a rise in suicidal thoughts, Plemmons has seen young people engaging in “more dramatic ways” of harming themselves.

“Hanging and suffocation seem to be around in a way they weren't before,” he said.

## **Kids' media getting 'more and more graphic'**

Nelson, the doctor at Cincinnati Children's, said he's amazed at how much information youth has access to — some of which can be traumatizing. In addition to things like cyberbullying, he said, kids can now easily access information about how to hurt themselves.

“The media that children are exposed to gets more and more sophisticated and more and more graphic and so kids get exposed to more and more things,” he said.

Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters has said his office wants to examine a computer that Gabriel owned for any clues to his suicide.

Although the CDC says that the majority of young people report little to no involvement in electronic aggression, it is still [an emerging public health problem](#).

Any form of bullying, whether face-to-face or online, is known to be

connected to depression and suicidal behaviors in young people.

The CDC found youth who observe bullying behavior without participating in it report feeling more helpless and less connected to parents and schools than those who have not witnessed bullying.

On May 12, Cincinnati Public Schools released the video footage of the incident involving Gabriel along with a timeline of events. The [statement on CPS's website](#) said staffers were not aware that he had been knocked down until a student notified them that “a boy is laying on the ground outside of the bathroom.” Gabriel's mother said school officials initially told her that her son had fainted.

CPS said they are now reviewing procedures regarding adult supervision in the restrooms with faculty and staff.

“We are committed to student safety and ensuring that all CPS schools foster a positive, learning environment,” the statement said.

When a young patient is hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or behaviors, physicians at Cincinnati Children work on developing coping skills and a safety plan. That means working with parents —and schools to ensure the child gets the help they need after they leave the hospital.

“Education is really important,” Vanderbilt's Plemmons said. “Schools play a role, parents play a role.”

## **Warning signs of suicide**

People who are wrestling with thoughts of suicide give off indicators. Here are a few things to watch for, and if you see them, ask if help is needed immediately.

- Talking to others or posting on social media about suicide, about

wanting to die or about feeling hopeless or trapped or a burden to others.

- Looking for ways to die by suicide — gathering medication, sharp objects, firearms, or looking online for methods.
- Expressing unbearable emotional pain.
- Visiting or calling people to "say good-bye."
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Suddenly becoming calm or cheerful after a long period of depression

**More:** [Video: Footage shows incident with 8-year-old two days before suicide](#)