

**To: All Providers**  
**From: PerformCare**  
**Date: November 2, 2023**  
**Subject: Suicide Prevention #14: Considerations in Working with Black Youth**

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PerformCare would like to raise awareness about a rising concern related to suicide risk among Black youth, as well as risk factors specific to this population. A report was released in August 2023 by Johns Hopkins and the Center for Gun Violence Solutions, identifying rising concerns. It is historically well documented in epidemiology for suicide that the rates for Black people have been lower than that of other races and ethnicities. This has changed in the past several years for Black youth according to this report. Deaths by suicide have increased by 144% from 2007 to 2020 in 10–17-year-old Black youth. Black boys are dying by suicide at a rate 2.3 times higher than girls in this population. There has been a 66% increase from 13% to 21.6% from 2009 to 2021 in Black high school students who have considered suicide. Black youth take their life most often by suffocation (47.1%), followed closely by death by firearms (40.9%). The report acknowledged an absence of literature to understand this phenomenon, as well as evidence-based interventions. Awareness of these marked increases should lead to more in-depth inquiry or more frequent assessment of risk in this population.

While more research is needed, Providers can share this information with therapists to promote a thorough understanding of the specialized risk factors for Black youth and incorporate this knowledge into risk assessment and safety planning. Youth of all races and ethnicities share similar risk factors. But risk factors specific to Black youth have been identified. First, the COVID Pandemic was noted to impact Black youth to a greater degree related to increased mental health concerns such as fear, isolation, and barriers to receiving informal and formal supports. Additional risk factors are outlined below:

- Societal risk factors include institutional racism; mass incarceration of loved ones or involvement in the juvenile justice system; intergenerational trauma; and stigma with seeking formal supports.
- Community risk factors are living in unsafe environments where there is a lack of cohesion and limited access to social supports; community violence; access to quality healthcare; and a lack of engagement and connection to school.
- Relational risk factors were identified as interpersonal racism and discrimination on various levels.
- Individual risk factors are higher levels of physical and mental health concerns (most notably depression and anxiety); Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES); and the potential for lead exposure and its impact on behaviors.

#### References

Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Department of Mental Health. (2023). Still ringing the alarm: an enduring call to action for Black youth suicide prevention. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2023-08/2023-august-still-ringing-alarm.pdf>