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CONNECTICUT DPH AND DMHAS ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO SEEK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TO ADDRESS STRESS AND DEPRESSION DURING WINTER HOLIDAY SEASON

**SELF-CARE, REFLECTION, AND USING AVAILABLE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE
CRITICAL TO HELP COMBAT STRESS AND DEPRESSION DURING THE HOLIDAYS**

Hartford – As we enter the winter holiday season, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) are reminding residents to seek help if they are having trouble coping with depression or the stresses of the holiday season. It is also an important time to check in with friends who may be feeling isolated. Not everyone experiences the joy and happiness often pictured in holiday images. For many, the holiday season can bring about mixed emotions as well as feelings of being overwhelmed, often brought about by the demands of the holidays, the change in seasons, and shorter daylight hours, which can intensify stress and depression.

“Our hope is that everyone has a joyous season as it is meant to be, but for many it is tragic,” said **DPH Commissioner Renée D. Coleman-Mitchell**. “If you know someone who may be melancholy and life is difficult, please reach out. Their situation may be spiraling out of control. Don’t assume they are ok – check in on them. Make sure they know they are not alone. Suicide is a very devastating loss, leaving shattered lives of loved ones behind. DPH is committed to reducing suicide rates by ongoing monitoring of suicide trends, spreading awareness of risks and warning signs, while working alongside our partnering agencies to reduce these deaths.”

“I encourage everyone to take a moment to care for their own mental wellness during times that can bring high stress, including the holiday season,” said **DMHAS Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon**. “It’s normal to feel stress during the holiday season, and people who feel this way are not alone. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your stress, and having a hard time managing it or other emotions, please reach out to your primary care provider or call 2-1-1 to access mental health and crisis services near you.”

Services available can help address depression and reduce the risk of suicide. CT data show that feeling depressed, and having a mental illness are often associated with suicide death. In addition, other contributing factors are having a physical health problem (i.e. terminal illness, chronic pain and disability), divorce or separation, or alcohol misuse. Since the federally-funded Connecticut Violent Death Reporting System (CTVDRS) was launched in 2015, DPH has reported an annual average of 399 suicides. Of those who died by suicide, 90% were age 25 years and older, and the average age was 49 years-old. Connecticut's highest suicide rate was 26.2 per 100,000 among non-Hispanic White men, 45 years of age and older.

Unlike other states, the CTVDRS data show that Connecticut has *not* experienced an increasing suicide trend among residents aged 11-17 years-old from 2015-2018. Since 2015, the 11-17 age group's suicide rate was the lowest compared to all other age categories (18-24, 25-44, 45-64, and 65+).

Suicide statistics by age in CT 2015-2018 (annual deaths per 100,000 residents)

<u>Age</u>	<u>Deaths (per 100,000 residents 2015-2018)</u>
11-17	1.4
18-24	13.7
25-44	16.7
45-64	26.2
65 +	22.9

The overall suicide rate in Connecticut increased over this same time period from 9.6 to 10.4 per 100,000.

It is important for everyone to be self-aware of signs that your mental health needs attention and care. Some of the warning signs include: increased irritability, nervousness, and substance use; changes in sleep or appetite; loss of energy, concentration or interest in things you like; increased sense of hopelessness; withdrawing from people who are your usual supports; and self-harm and suicidal feelings, thoughts, or actions.

If you or someone you know is talking about wanting to die, looking for a way to kill oneself, talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose, talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain, or talking about being a burden to others, it is important to seek help immediately. The more signs a person shows, the greater the risk.

CT DPH, DMHAS, and the Department of Children and Families (DCF), along with the United Way of Connecticut and Wheeler Clinic are working collaboratively to support suicide prevention initiatives, such as the statewide “1 Word, 1 Voice, 1 Life” awareness campaign under the CT Suicide Advisory Board. The goal of this joint effort is to instill a message of hope and to let people know where they can turn for help. For more information about how to “Be the 1 to start the conversation” and this campaign, visit: www.preventsuicidect.org.

If in crisis, please call 211 or 1 (800) 273-8255 (TALK) or text “CT” to 741741. In an emergency, call or text 911.

