

## Week of June 15, 2020

# Behavioral Health Impact Situation Report

This situation report presents the potential behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for Washington State to inform planning efforts. The intended audience for this report is response planners and behavioral health agencies and organizations.

## Purpose

This report summarizes data analyses conducted by the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Group's Impact & Capacity Assessment Task Force. These analyses assess the likely current and future impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and potential for substance use issues among Washingtonians.

## Key Takeaways

- Symptoms of psychological distress and suicidal ideation remain elevated, particularly for youth.
- Drug overdose and alcohol-related emergency visits have been declining in recent weeks for most age groups.
- The week of June 1–7 had the lowest year-over-year increase in weekly domestic violence offenses since the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) began surveying law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in early April.
- Social media data suggest the increased sense of togetherness over the past two weeks is quickly receding and is being replaced by increased loneliness.

## Impact Assessment

This section summarizes data analyses that show the likely current and future impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and potential for substance use issues among Washingtonians.

## Syndromic Surveillance

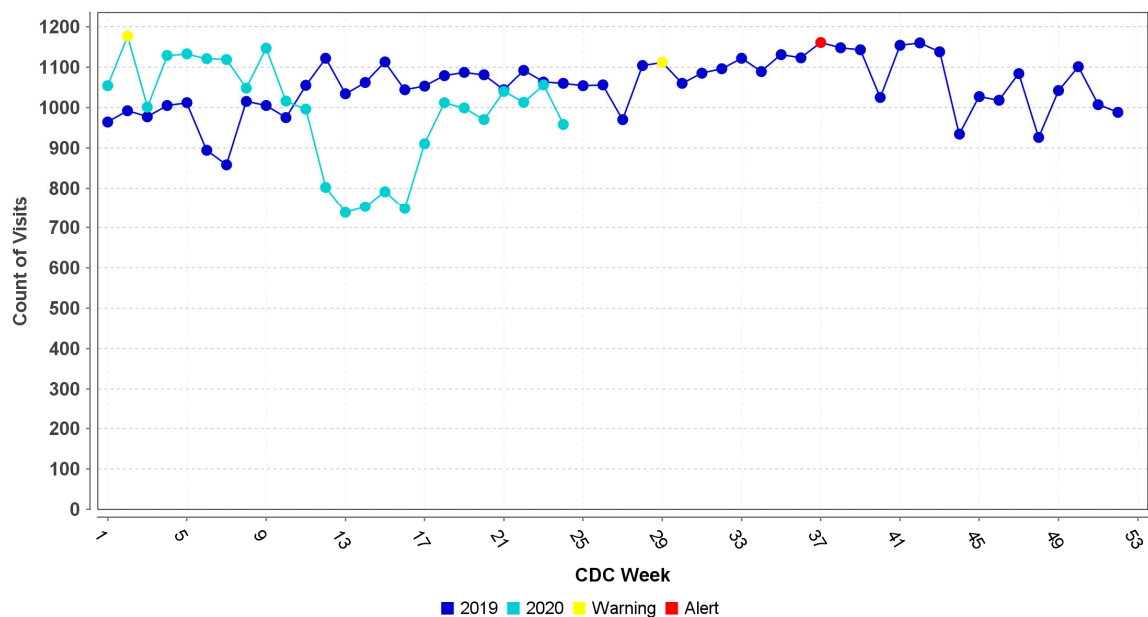
Syndromic surveillance data are collected in near real-time from hospitals and clinics within Washington State through the Rapid Health Information Network (RHINO). Key data elements reported include patient demographic information, chief complaint, and coded diagnoses. This robust system is the only source of Emergency Department (ED) data for Washington.

Relative to 2019, there was a 40-50% decline in volume of visits across care settings that corresponds to the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order implemented on March 23 (see CDC Week 13 in graphs below).<sup>1</sup> For this reason, indicators are presented as a total number of ED visits, rather than a percentage of ED visits, for 2019 and 2020.

## Psychological Distress

The absolute count of emergency visits for **psychological distress<sup>2</sup> in Washington State remains elevated** following implementation of the COVID-19 “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order. Counts of visits from Week 23 to Week 24 (weeks ending June 6 and June 13, respectively) declined slightly from 1061 to 970. This pattern is consistent across all age groups, except for youth ages 10–19 years. Weekly visits for psychological distress within this age group are up in recent weeks (from 92 to 112), with a statistical alert observed in Week 23.

**Count of emergency department visits for psychological distress<sup>2</sup> in Washington State, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**



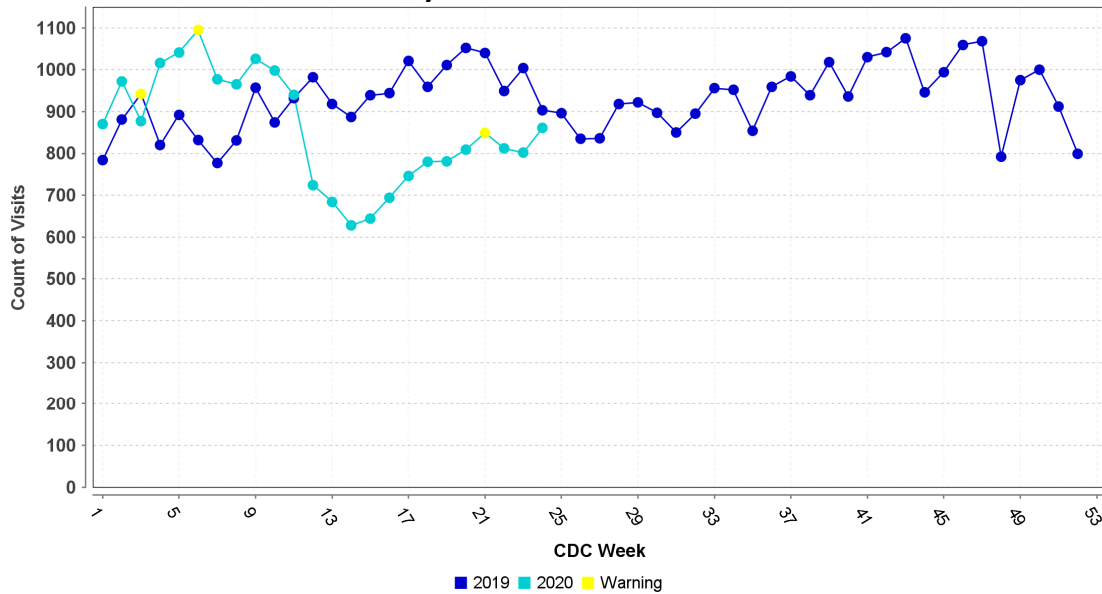
<sup>1</sup> Hartnett KP, Kite-Powell A, DeVies J, et al. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Emergency Department Visits — United States, January 1, 2019–May 30, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020; 69:699–704. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6923e1>

<sup>2</sup> Psychological distress in this context is considered a disaster-related syndrome comprised of panic, stress, and anxiety. It is indexed in the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform as Disaster-related Mental Health v1. Full details are available at <https://knowledgerepository.syndromicsurveillance.org/disaster-related-mental-health-v1-syndrome-definition-committee>.

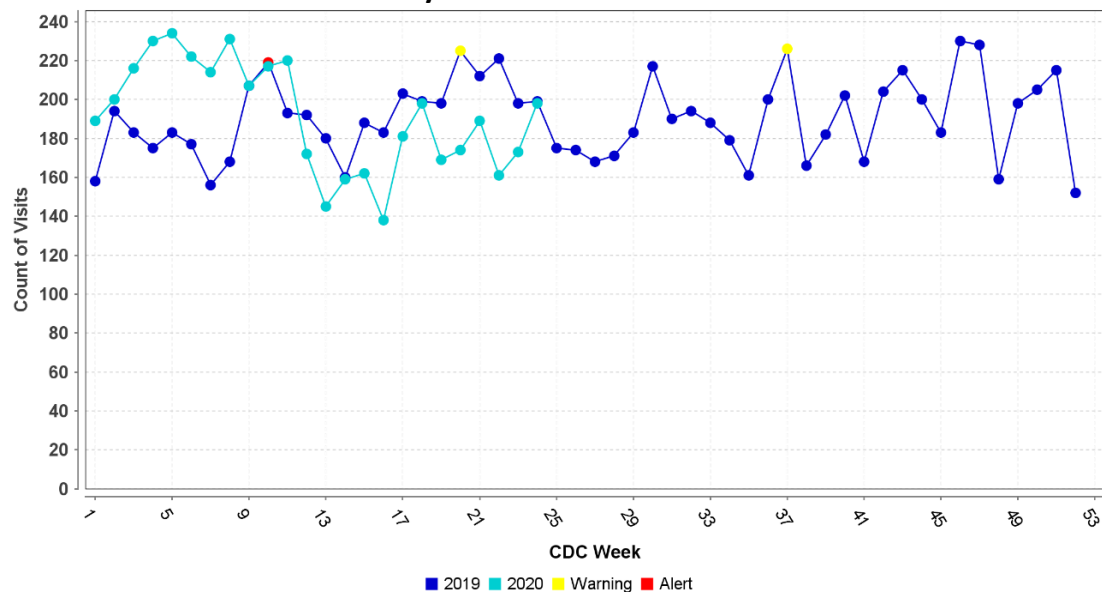
## Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts

The absolute count of emergency visits related to suicidal ideation in Washington State remains elevated following a statistical alert for Week 21. From Week 23 to Week 24, counts of emergency visits rose slightly from 806 to 874. This pattern is consistent for all age groups, with statistical alerts in Week 24 for youth ages 10–14 and for adults ages 45–54. The count of emergency visits for suicidal ideation-related symptoms remains lower than volumes observed in the corresponding weeks of 2019. From Week 23 to Week 24, counts of emergency visits for suicide attempts increased slightly from 174 to 198, reaching the volume of visits observed during the corresponding period in 2019.

**Count of emergency department visits for suicidal ideation in Washington State, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**



**Count of emergency department visits for suicide attempts in Washington State, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**

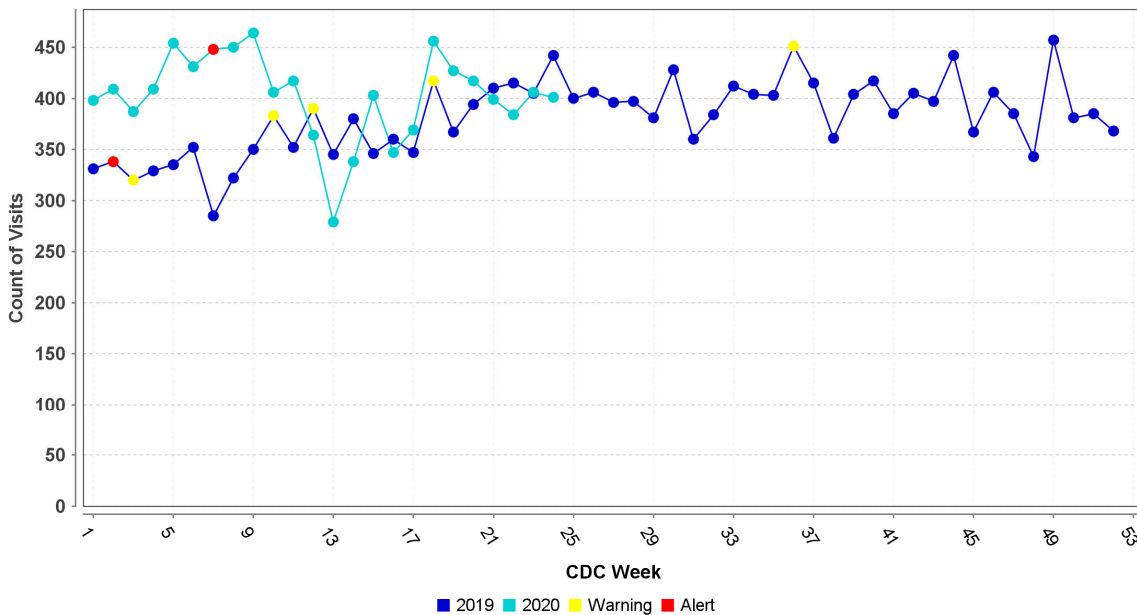


## Substance Use: Drug Overdose and Alcohol-related Emergency Visits

After a peak in mid-May 2020, the absolute counts of emergency visits for overdoses related to any drug<sup>3</sup> have been declining in recent weeks, overall and for most age groups. The exceptions to this are youth ages 10–19 and adults ages 20–29. A slight increase in visits (45 to 63 and 81 to 97, respectively) for these age groups was observed from Week 23 to Week 24.

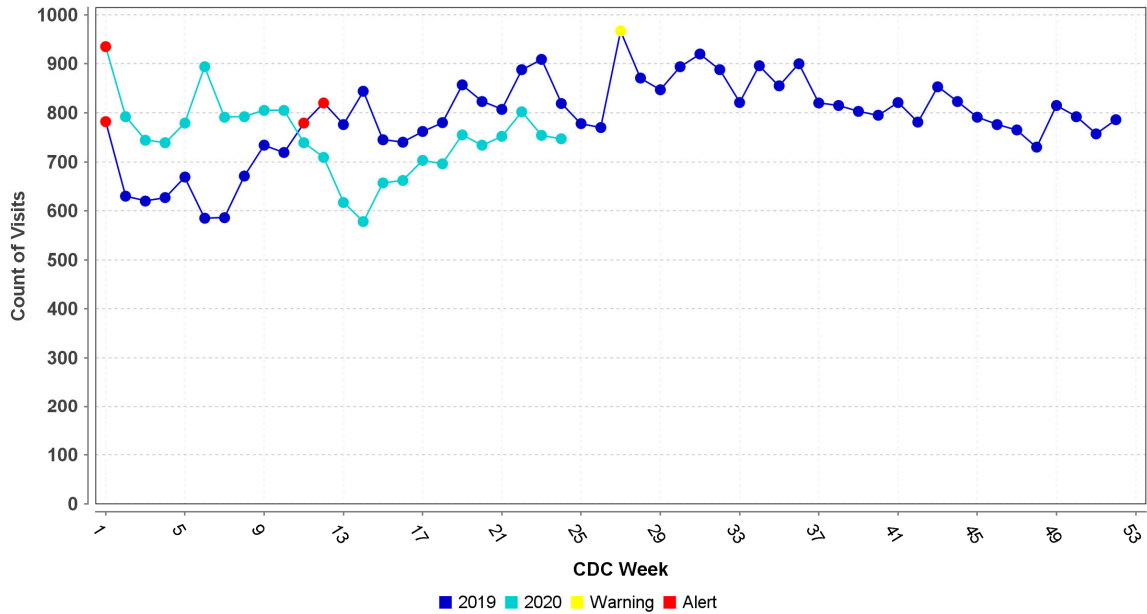
Alcohol-related emergency visits have risen steadily since the “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order, yet remain lower than pre-pandemic levels. In recent weeks, alcohol-related emergency visits declined slightly, overall and for most age groups. The exception to this is adults ages 20–29, for which a statistical elevation (112 to 134) in emergency visits from Week 23 to Week 24 was observed.

**Count of emergency department visits for any drug<sup>3</sup> overdose in Washington State, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**



<sup>3</sup> This definition specifies overdoses for any drug, including heroin, opioid, and stimulants. It is indexed in the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform as CDC All Drug v1. Full details are available at <https://knowledgerepository.syndromicsurveillance.org/cdc-all-drug-v1>.

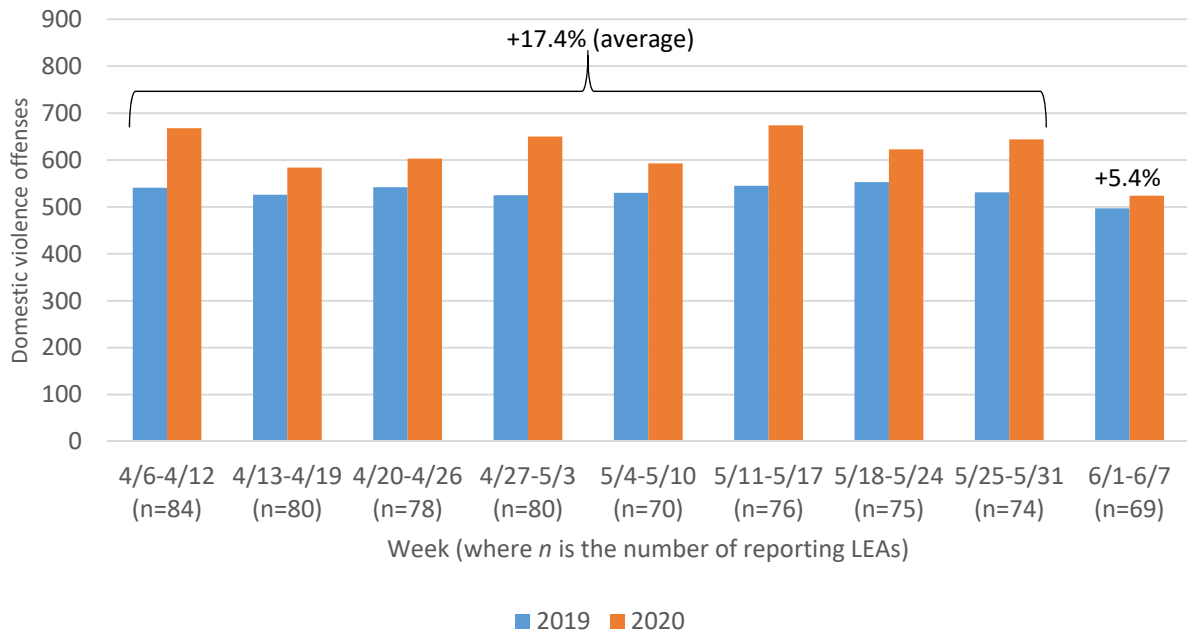
**Count of alcohol-related emergency department visits in Washington State, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**



**Crime — Domestic Violence**

According to survey data collected by WASPC, the period of **June 1–7 had the lowest year-over-year increase (5.4%) in weekly domestic violence offenses since WASPC began surveying law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in early April.** Not displayed is a 26% year-over-year decrease in other surveyed offenses, including theft, destruction of property, assault, and burglary.

**Domestic violence offenses reported to WASPC, by week: 2020 vs. 2019**



## Telephonic Support Line Activity — Suicidality and Substance Use

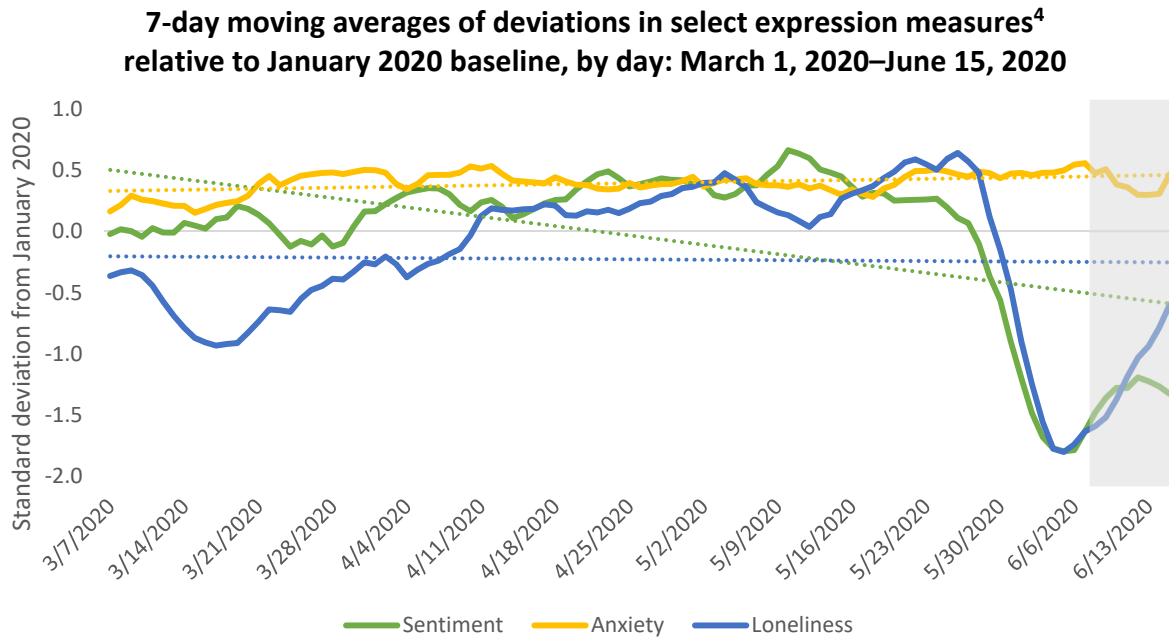
*There is no update since the Week of June 8 Situation Report.* **Calls to the Washington State Tobacco Quitline (WAQL) in April and May combined show a 41% decrease**, year-over-year, suggesting that Washingtonians addicted to nicotine may be coping with stress by postponing quit attempts and continuing to use tobacco. Meanwhile, calls to the Washington Recovery Help Line (WRHL) are fairly stable (down 3%, year-over-year) after a 13% increase from April to May. No new Washington State data are currently available for the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (SPLL), but May 2020 and 2019 comparison data will become available in the coming weeks.

## Product Sales — Marijuana and Liquor Taxes Collected

*There is no update since the Week of June 1 Situation Report.* The Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) summarizes monthly marijuana and liquor tax collections, which may be used as a representation for sales of legal recreational substances and, by extension, potential for substance use issues. After three months of elevated tax revenue levels for marijuana and comparable levels for liquor, **year-over-year sales of marijuana and liquor were up a combined 38% in May 2020**. June product sales data will be available in July.

## Social Media — Expressions of Positive Sentiment, Loneliness, and Anxiety

Tweets<sup>4</sup> geo-tagged to Washington State suggest that **the previous decrease in loneliness (or increased sense of togetherness) is quickly receding**, and previous improvements in (positive) sentiment may be reversing. Additionally, the data suggest that there was a slight and short-lived decrease in anxiety over the past week.



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<sup>4</sup> Since January 2020, researchers at the Penn Center for Digital Health have been tracking “tweets” about the COVID-19 pandemic, analyzing language used by Twitter users to quantify the extent to which they reflect expressions of positive sentiment, loneliness, and anxiety. Although these measures have been made publicly available, the researchers included a disclaimer, stating that “the data are still being validated and are not ready for public policy decision making.”