

Department of Defense (DoD) Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR) 4th Quarter, CY 2020

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The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$6,770 for the 2021 Fiscal Year. This includes \$3,940 in expenses and \$2,830 in DoD labor.



**DEFENSE SUICIDE
PREVENTION OFFICE**

Introduction

The Department of Defense (DoD) is fully committed to preventing suicides in our military community – every death by suicide is a tragedy. The DoD recognizes the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of our Service members and families. We are closely monitoring potential impacts and taking proactive steps to mitigate those potential impacts. During this time, we remain dedicated in our efforts to educate the force, support the force, and emphasize social connectedness.

At this time, it is too early to determine whether suicide rates will increase or decrease for Calendar Year 2020. The number of suicide deaths in the current report are preliminary and subject to change, as previously unknown cases are reported and some known cases are further investigated. The DoD needs to allow appropriate latitude to investigate individual cases to make such a determination, and to then conduct the necessary statistical analyses to understand trends over time. The official annual suicide counts and rates for CY 2020 will be published in the DoD Annual Suicide Report – Calendar Year 2020.

To help determine the impact of suicide on the Total Force, the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) routinely collects and reports surveillance data on suicide mortality across the Department. The most up-to-date counts of suicide deaths are reported in the Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR).¹ The QSR complies with Objective 11.1 of the DoD Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention (DSSP) by providing timely and accurate suicide data to guide suicide prevention efforts across the Department.

DSPO collects suicide data via a collaborative effort with the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) and the Suicide Prevention Program Offices of the Military Services (i.e., Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force). AFMES is the official DoD entity responsible for verifying and reporting deaths by suicide for the Active Component and, to the extent available, the Reserve Component, to DSPO.^{2,3} These numbers are reconciled with the Military Services to ensure the most accurate information is reported.

Quarters are based upon the Calendar Year (CY) and defined as:

- Quarter 1 (Q1): January 1st – March 31st
- Quarter 2 (Q2): April 1st – June 30th
- Quarter 3 (Q3): July 1st – September 30th
- Quarter 4 (Q4): October 1st – December 31st

The current report presents data from Q4 of CY 2020. Data include all known or suspected suicides (both confirmed and pending) as of December 31, 2020, for both the Active and Reserve Components. Hence, the numbers presented in this report are preliminary and

¹ Absolute counts do not account for changes in population size. Consequently, caution should be used when making comparisons across groups and/or interpreting changes in suicide counts across time.

² Active Component: Full-time members of the U.S. Armed Forces and Cadets/Midshipmen at the designated military academies.

³ Reserve Component: Limited to members of the Selected Reserves (SELRES). SELRES are drilling and training members of the National Guard and Reserve, Individual Mobilization Augmentees, and full-time support Active Guard and Reservists. This excludes members of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and Inactive National Guard (ING).

subject to change in future quarterly reports as previously unknown suicide cases are reported.⁴ In addition, caution should be used when interpreting seeming trends over time, as true trends require statistical analysis. This includes incorporating potential population shifts within a given Service to understand whether a seeming increase or decrease is a true trend across time.

Caution should be used when making comparisons across groups and/or interpreting changes in suicide counts across time because counts do not account for changes in population size. Rates account for differences in population sizes; and, as such, provide a more standardized way to make comparisons over time or across groups.⁵ For the most recent DoD annual suicide rates and trends/changes over time, please see the CY 2019 DoD Annual Suicide Report (available at: <https://www.dspo.mil/ASR/>). The official annual suicide counts and rates for CY 2020 will be published in the DoD Annual Suicide Report – Calendar Year 2020.

QSR Data

Attachment A details the number of suicide deaths by Service and Component. For Q4 of CY 2020, the Military Services reported the following:

- 99 in the **Active Component**
- 18 in the **Reserve**
- 39 in the **National Guard**

Comparisons of suicide counts between Q4 CY 2019 and Q4 CY 2020 are provided below.⁶

- For Q4 CY 2020, the number of **Active Component** suicide deaths decreased by 1 compared to Q4 CY 2019 (99 versus 100 suicide deaths)
 - Army Active Component suicide deaths stayed the same
 - Marine Corps Active Component suicide deaths increased by 2
 - Navy Active Component suicide deaths decreased by 4
 - Air Force Active Component suicide deaths increased by 1
- For Q4 CY 2020, the number of **Reserve** suicide deaths increased by 7 compared to Q4 CY 2019 (18 versus 11 suicide deaths)
 - Army Reserve suicide deaths increased by 3
 - Marine Corps Reserve suicide deaths increased by 2
 - Navy Reserve suicide deaths increased by 2
 - Air Force Reserve suicide deaths stayed the same
- For Q4 CY 2020, the number of **National Guard** suicide deaths increased by 25 compared to Q4 CY 2019 (39 versus 14 suicide deaths)
 - Army National Guard suicide deaths increased by 23
 - Air National Guard suicide deaths increased by 2

⁴ Official annual suicide counts and unadjusted rates are published in the DoD Annual Suicide Report. The most recent report is for CY 2019. Available at: <https://www.dspo.mil/ASR/>.

⁵ Rates are defined as the total number of suicides divided by the population for a given time period.


⁶ Research on the seasonal effects of suicide death has shown mixed results (e.g., Gutzwiller, 2011; McCleary, 1994; Postalache, 2012; Rossler, 2010). Comparisons made above are solely for descriptive purposes and may not reflect true statistical increases or decreases in suicide.


Attachment A

DoD Component and Service	CY 2014	CY 2015				Total 2015	CY 2016				Total 2016	CY 2017				Total 2017
	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Active Component	276	60	71	72	63	266	62	56	83	79	280	74	58	71	84	287
Army	126	33	28	32	27	120	31	20	42	37	130	32	24	27	33	116
Marine Corps	34	3	12	13	11	39	12	11	8	6	37	7	9	15	12	43
Navy	54	10	14	11	8	43	9	10	19	14	52	16	13	15	21	65
Air Force	62	14	17	16	17	64	10	15	14	22	61	19	12	14	18	63
Reserve Component	170	42	54	72	46	214	56	51	45	50	202	53	68	65	40	226
Reserve	79	13	21	37	18	89	18	24	18	20	80	21	29	27	16	93
Army Reserve	42	9	17	21	8	55	6	13	11	11	41	12	20	17	14	63
Marine Corps Reserve	12	1	1	8	1	11	4	6	5	4	19	5	3	2	0	10
Navy Reserve	15	2	2	5	5	14	3	3	1	3	10	2	2	3	2	9
Air Force Reserve	10	1	1	3	4	9	5	2	1	2	10	2	4	5	0	11
National Guard	91	29	33	35	28	125	38	27	27	30	122	32	39	38	24	133
Army National Guard	77	21	28	30	25	104	33	22	26	27	108	30	35	35	21	121
Air National Guard	14	8	5	5	3	21	5	5	1	3	14	2	4	3	3	12

DoD Component and Service	CY 2018					Total 2018	CY 2019				Total 2019	CY 2020				Total 2020
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1		Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1		Q2	Q3	Q4		
Active Component	81	78	78	89	326	92	72	84	100	348	88	80	110	99	377	
Army	36	31	40	34	141	31	37	34	44	146	37	41	51	44	173	
Marine Corps	13	13	15	16	57	14	6	11	16	47	14	9	19	18	60	
Navy	23	15	11	19	68	22	14	19	18	73	18	12	19	14	63	
Air Force	9	19	12	20	60	25	15	20	22	82	19	18	21	23	81	
Reserve Component	49	44	62	62	217	45	43	42	25	155	45	48	44	57	194	
Reserve	22	16	19	24	81	21	16	17	11	65	20	25	13	18	76	
Army Reserve	15	11	13	9	48	10	8	11	7	36	9	16	7	10	42	
Marine Corps Reserve	4	1	4	10	19	5	1	1	2	9	2	2	2	4	10	
Navy Reserve	3	3	2	3	11	2	2	3	0	7	5	3	2	2	12	
Air Force Reserve	0	1	0	2	3	4	5	2	2	13	4	4	2	2	12	
National Guard	27	28	43	38	136	24	27	25	14	90	25	23	31	39	118	
Army National Guard	24	26	36	33	119	19	24	22	11	76	21	18	29	34	102	
Air National Guard	3	2	7	5	17	5	3	3	3	14	4	5	2	5	16	

Note: All figures above may be subject to change in future publications as updated information becomes available. Suicide counts (both confirmed and pending) are current as of 31 December 2020. Currently, Air Force data includes U.S. Space Force data.

 Indicates a change from the previous QSR based on updated information.

 Highlighted for comparison