



Island County Behavioral Health Impact Situation Report

This situation report presents the potential behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for Island County to inform planning efforts. The intended audience for this report includes organizations or individuals who are responding to or helping to mitigate the behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to identify and provide localized data similar to the COVID-19 Behavioral Health Group's weekly statewide Behavioral Health Impact Situation Report. This report summarizes data from CDC Syndromic Surveillance Database, WhidbeyHealth, the United States Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, and the Island County CARES program. These analyses examine the likely current and future impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and potential for substance use issues among Island County residents.

Key Takeaways

- In the month of August, emergency department (ED) visit counts for psychological distress and drug overdose were both higher in the 2020 August count when compared to the 2019 August count.
- Suicide-related ED visits were down in the month of August 2020 compared to August 2019. Disparities among racial and ethnic minorities are more evident across the state.
- The latest U.S. Census Bureau estimates suggest that the majority of rural Washington adults had feelings of anxiety for at least several days in the last week.
- The Island County Human Services CARES countywide support line has been active for over three months and has fielded nearly 600 request for support. In August 2020 the referral line received four times as many requests for services when compared to the July 2020.

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 Island County residents.

Syndromic Surveillance

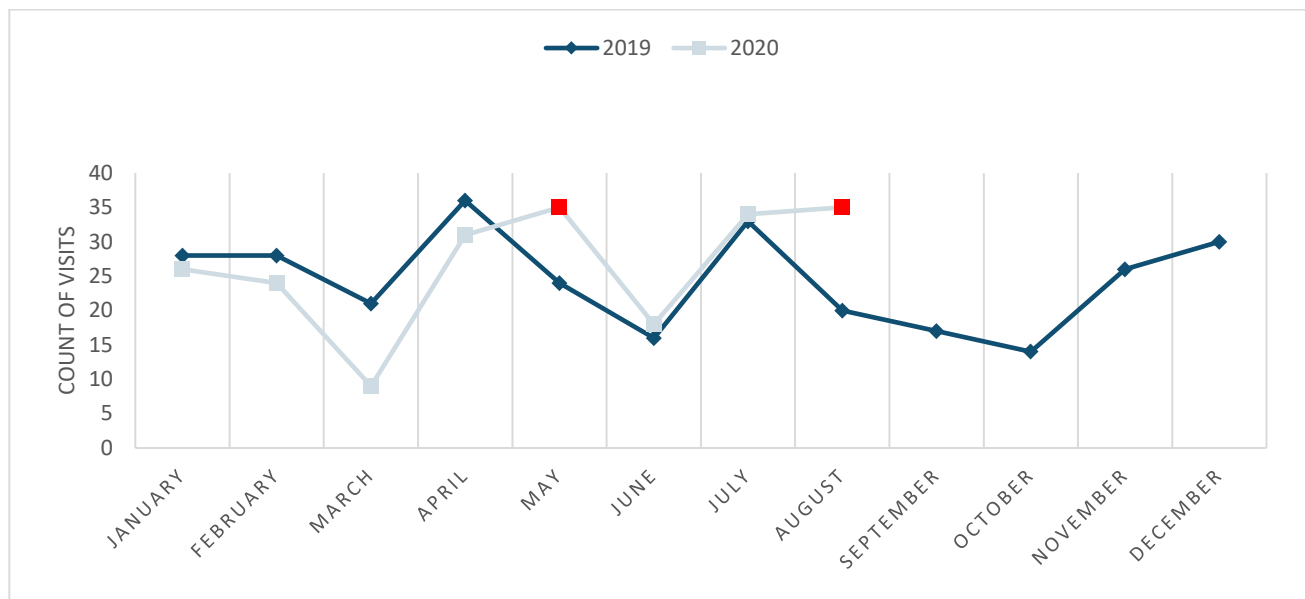
Syndromic surveillance data are collected in near real-time from hospitals and clinics across Washington, and are always subject to updates. [This system](#) is the primary source of ED data for Washington. WhidbeyHealth, the public hospital district for Island County, currently does not submit to the reporting system, and all Whidbey Island ED data used for this report was shared directly from WhidbeyHealth.

Across Washington State, 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 23rd, 2020. Although total ED visit counts appear to have returned to pre-pandemic levels, the below indicators are presented as counts of ED visits, rather than percentages of ED visits, to account for unstable denominators.

Psychological Distress¹

In August 2020 Whidbey Health had the highest ED visit count for psychological distress since May 2020. However May and August, were the highest on record for the year.

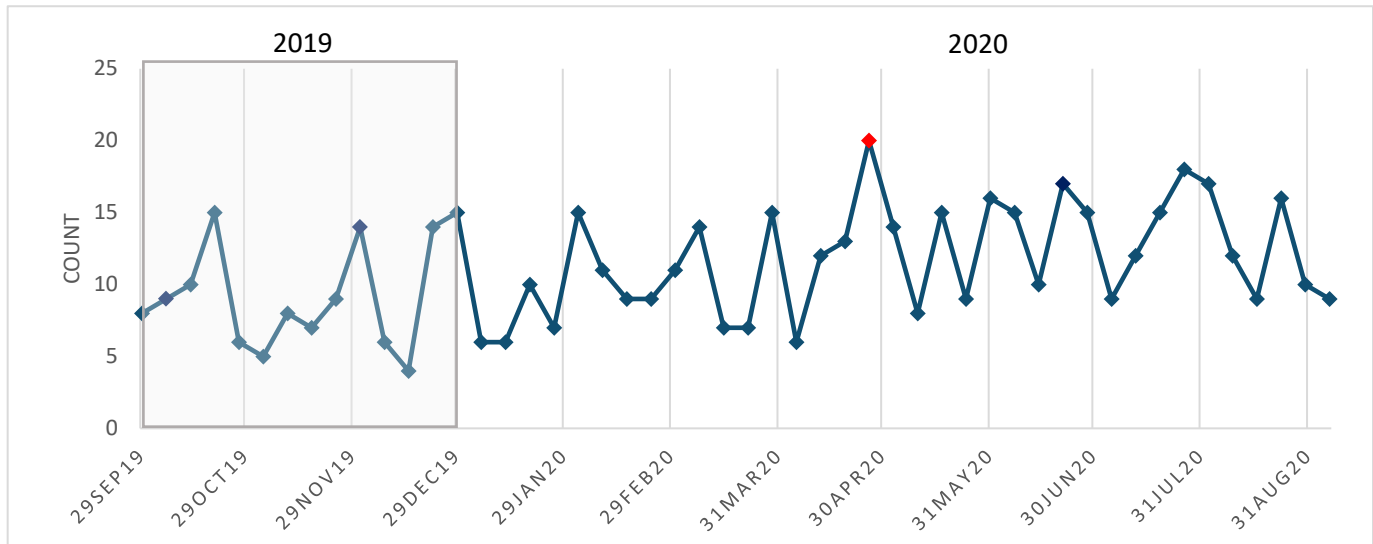
Graph 1: Count of emergency department visits for psychological distress on Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



¹ 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>.

Within the last 12 months (September 2019-August 2020), the highest count of Island County residents reporting to a non-WH ED for psychological distress occurred in April/May 2020.

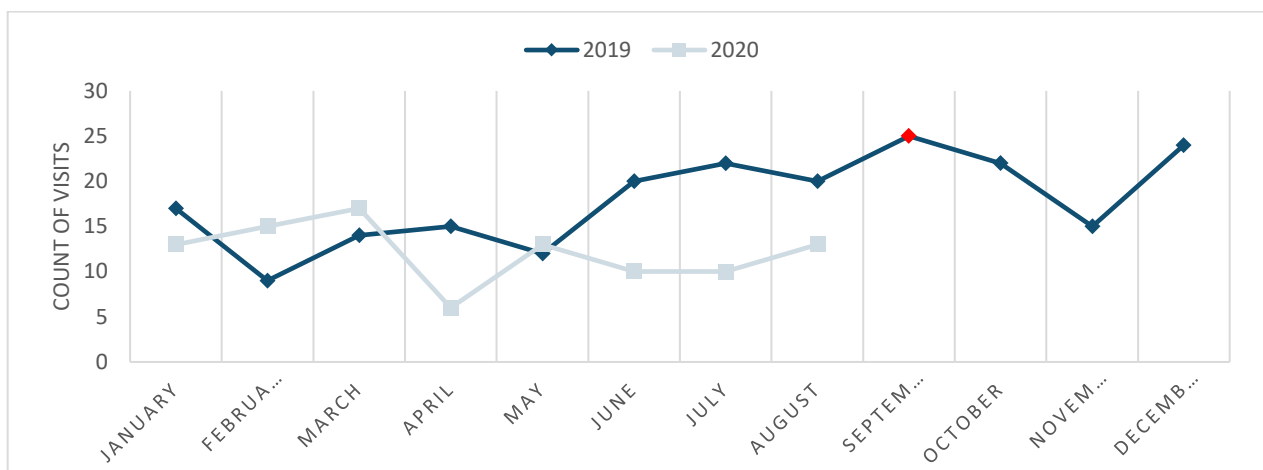
Graph 1.2: Count of emergency department visits for psychological distress for Island County residents who received service outside of Whidbey Health: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)



Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts

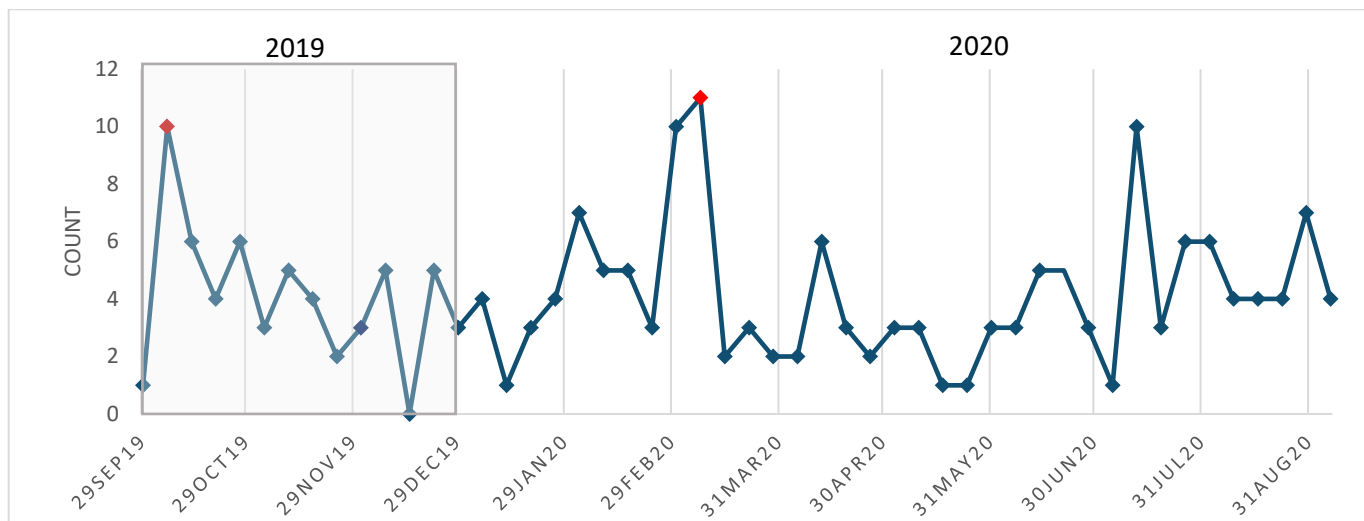
Whidbey Island ED visit counts for suicidal ideation and attempts is not comparable to many monthly counts in 2019. ED visits for suicidal ideation and attempts have been lower than 2019 counts since May 2020, with higher counts occurring in February and March 2020.

Graph 2: Count of emergency department visits for suicidal ideation and/or Attempt on Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



March 2020 saw the highest count of Island County residents seen in ED outside of Whidbey Island for suicide ideation. With an additional spike of counts occurring in early July 2020 which is comparable to the count that in October 2019.

Graph 2.2: Count of emergency department visits for suicidal ideation for Island County residents who received services outside of Whidbey Island: Past 12 months (Source: Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)



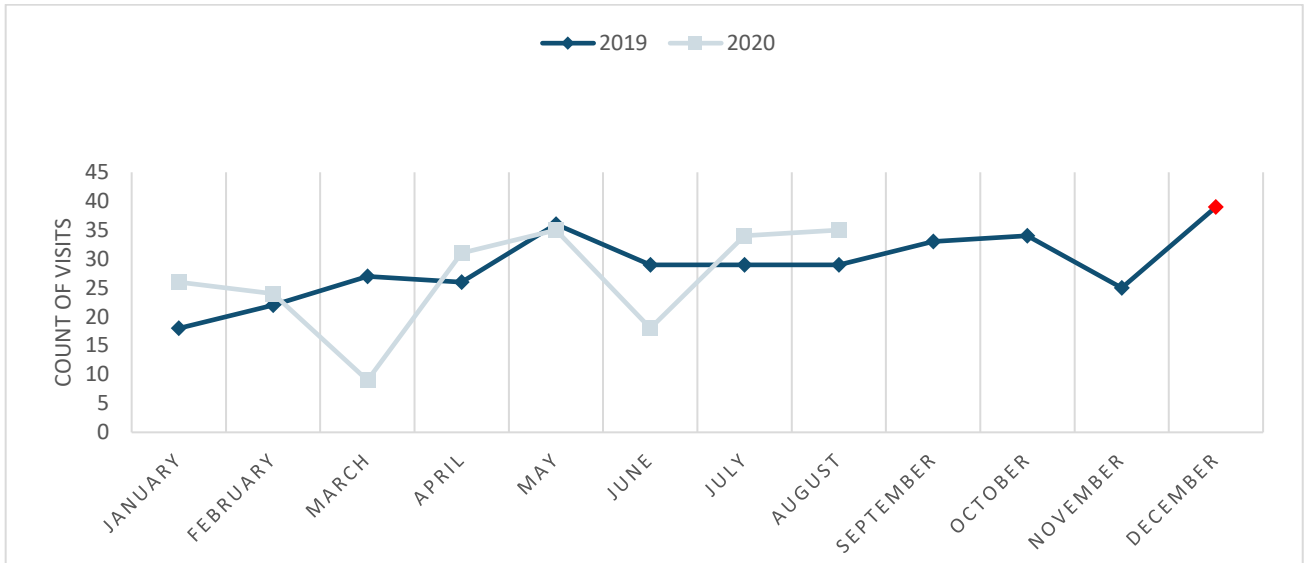
Substance Use — Drug Overdose² and Alcohol-Related Emergency Visits

As with psychological distress related ED visits on Whidbey Island and all Island County residents seen in an ED outside of Whidbey, **August had the highest ED visit count for alcohol and drug overdose since December 2019.** Across the state, warnings³ were added for individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native and individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino in June 2020.

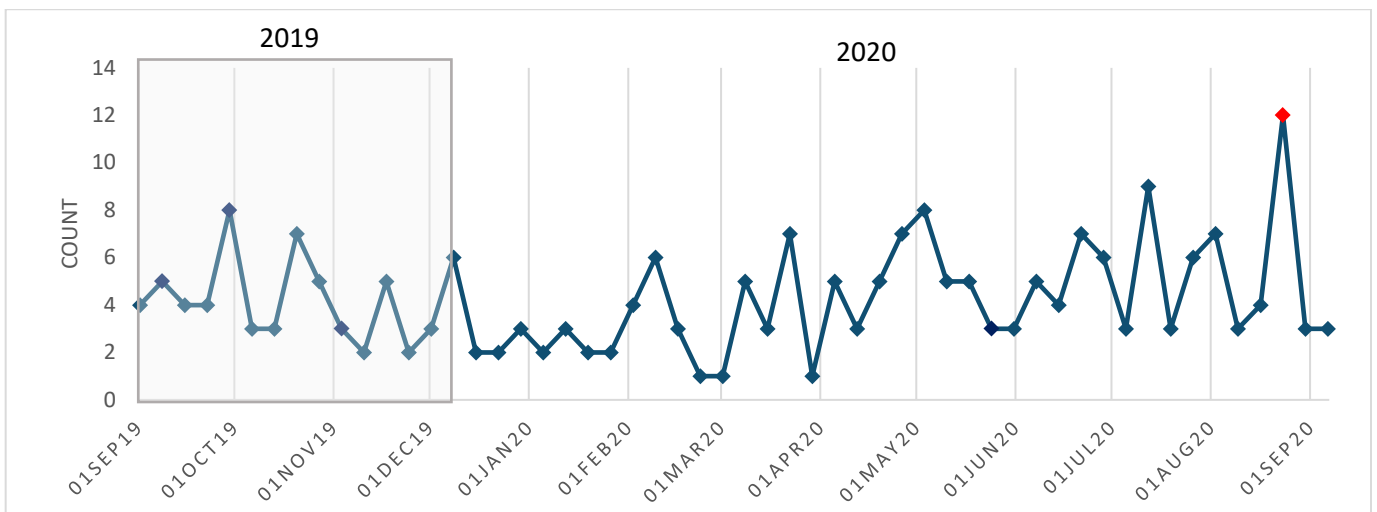
² This definition specifies overdoses for any drug, including heroin, opioid, and stimulants. It is indexed in the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-Based Epidemics (ESSENCE) platform as CDC All Drug v1. Full details available at <https://knowledgerepository.syndromicsurveillance.org/cdc-all-drug-v1>.

³ Statistical warnings and alerts are displayed when a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) algorithm detects a weekly count at least three standard deviations¹ above a 28-week average count, ending three weeks prior to the week with a warning ($p < 0.05$) or alert ($p < 0.01$).

Graph 3: Count of emergency department visits for alcohol and for overdose by any drug Whidbey Island: 2020 vs. 2019 (Source: WH ED Surveillance)



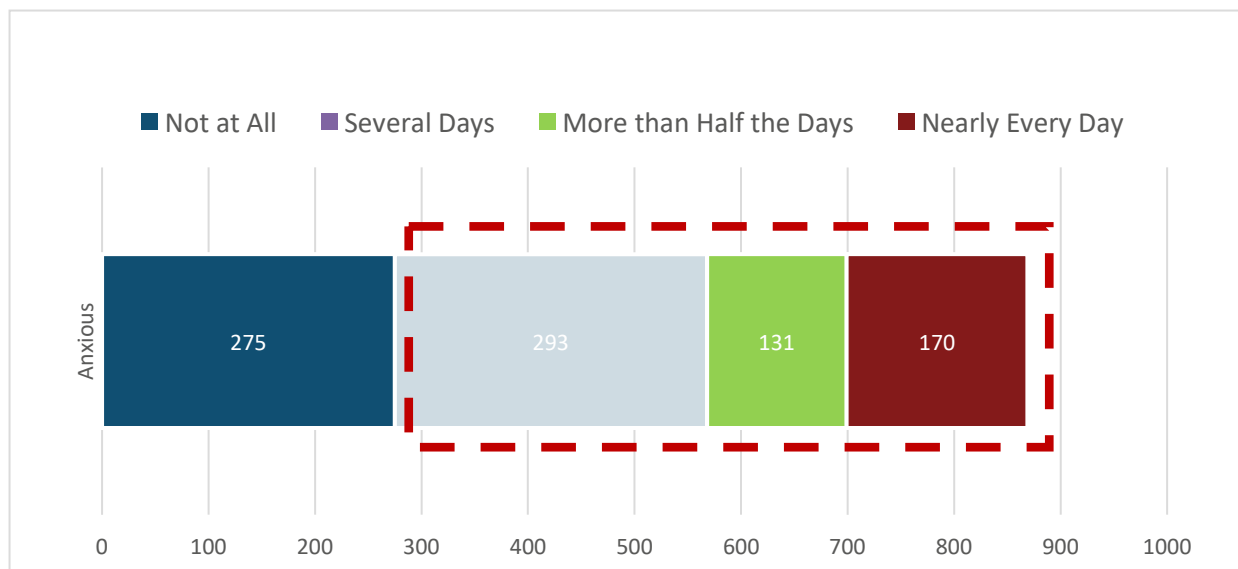
Graph 3.2: Count of emergency department visits for alcohol and for overdose by any drug for Island County residents who received service delivery outside Whidbey Island: Past 12 months (Source: CDC ED Surveillance ESSENCE)



General Surveillance — Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

Survey data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau⁴ between July 16–21 suggest the majority of rural Washington adults experience frequent feelings of anxiety. **Five hundred and ninety four reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety on at least several days in the past week.**

Graph 4: Estimated rural Washington adults with feelings of anxiety least several days, by week: July 16–July 21 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)



Island County CARES Support Program Activity

The Island County Human Services countywide CARES online referral system launched in June 2020. Behavioral Health support specialists help Island County residents address their stress and anxiety about COVID-19, navigate available resources, as well as provide financial assistance through CARES funds. As of August 31st, the CARES online referral system had fielded 559 referrals for services. Difficulties due to COVID-19 fell within eight categories including: COVID-19 Diagnosis for Self/Family; Substance Use; Childcare; Behavioral Health Support Needs; Quarantine; Anxiety, Stress, Depression; and an “other” category. Examples of request for “other” include difficulties with finances, medical issues, and housing.

⁴ 5 In May, the U.S. Census Bureau began measuring the social and economic impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic with a weekly Household Pulse survey of adults across the country. Four questions ask survey respondents how often they have experienced specific symptoms associated with anxiety and depression over the past week.

The CARES program saw a fourfold increase in referrals in August. The majority of referrals, 35.2%, indicated a need for support with Job Loss or Reduction with hours. Followed closely by requests for support with Anxiety, Stress, and Depression with 30.2% of individuals requesting this support. Additionally, in August the CARES program saw an 83% increase in referrals for services related to childcare needs. Considered together, the data suggest that Island County residents are struggling with employment security and with anxiety, stress, and/or depression and are increasingly seeking support.

Graph 5 Referrals to the ICHS CARES Program, by month: 2020 (Source: Island County Human Services)

