



Hospital-presenting self-harm during January-March 2021

Data Briefing, December 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures to address it have led to an increase in individual and population level risk factors for self-harm and suicide. Surveillance of mental health issues including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal behaviours have been identified as a priority in order to inform interventions and comprehensive responses (Sinyor et al., 2021).

Following an unrestricted Christmas holiday period with large numbers of visitors from the UK, Ireland experienced its third and largest wave of COVID-19 in early 2021, even achieving the highest seven-day infection rate in the world in mid-January (Figure 1). Level 5 restrictions applied throughout January-March 2021, with a phased return to schools in March, as Ireland's vaccination programme provided a first dose to 20% of over 18 year-olds.

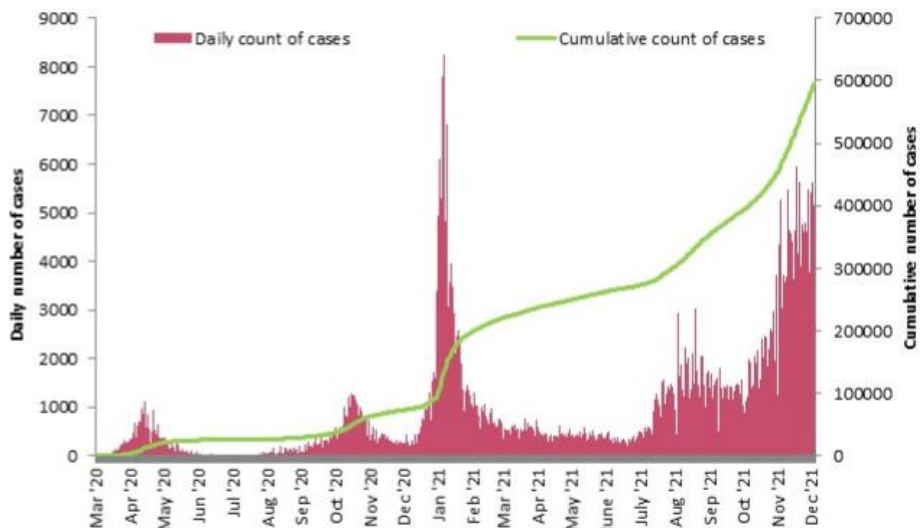


Figure 1: Number and cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ireland (Available at: hpsc.ie)

The National Self-Harm Registry Ireland (NSHRI), operated by the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) and funded by the Health Service Executive National Office for Suicide Prevention, collects data on self-harm presentations to hospital emergency departments in the Republic of Ireland. This data briefing provides information on the monthly number of self-harm presentations to 18 hospitals during January-March 2021, compared to presentations made to the same hospitals in the equivalent months of 2018 and 2019. Data from 2018 and 2019 are used for comparison because early 2020 was associated with the outbreak of the pandemic in Ireland.

These 18 hospitals provide nationally-representative data given they are spread across the country and are located in the centres of large cities, in city suburbs and in large towns. In 2018 and 2019, these hospitals accounted for 62% of the national number of self-harm presentations recorded by the NSHRI. It should be noted that the data presented for 2021 are provisional and subject to change.

The NSHRI recorded a total of 1,778 self-harm presentations to the 18 hospitals during January-March 2021, equivalent to 19.8 self-harm presentations per day. A total of 3,788 self-harm presentations to these 18 hospitals were recorded for the same months of 2018-2019, equating to a rate of 21.0 per day. Therefore, the rate of hospital-presenting self-

harm was 6% lower in the first three months of 2021 compared to 2018-2019 (Rate ratio=0.94, 95% confidence interval=0.88, 0.99).

There was a marked reduction in hospital-presenting self-harm in January 2021 (Figure 2).

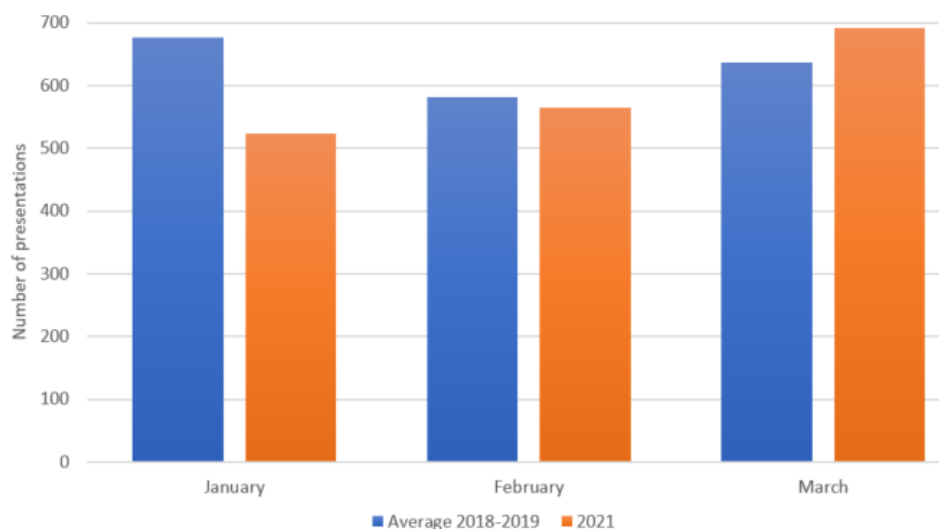


Figure 2: Monthly self-harm presentations to 18 hospitals in Ireland during January–March 2018-2019 and 2021

In January 2021, there were 523 self-harm presentations to the 18 hospitals. The daily rate was 16.9, which is 23% lower than the rate of 21.8 per day in January 2018-2019 (Table 1). In February and March 2021, the daily rate was broadly in line with the rate for the same months of 2018-2019 - 3% lower in February and 9% higher in March.

Table 1: Monthly self-harm presentations to 18 hospitals during 2021 and 2018-2019

Month	Number (daily rate) in 2021	Average number (daily rate) in 2018-2019	Rate ratio (95% confidence interval)
January	523 (16.9)	677 (21.8)	0.77 (0.70, 0.86)
February	564 (20.1)	581 (20.8)	0.97 (0.88, 1.07)
March	691 (22.3)	637 (20.5)	1.09 (0.99, 1.19)
Total	1778 (19.8)	1894 (21.0)	0.94 (0.89, 0.99)

Note: The rate ratio (RR) is the daily rate for a period in 2021 divided by the daily rate in the same period of 2018-2019. RRs equal or close to one indicate that the rate in 2021 was equal or similar to the rate in 2018-2019. RRs greater than one indicate that the rate in 2021 was higher than in 2018-2019. RRs less than one indicate that the rate was lower in 2021. The difference between the rate in 2021 and 2018-2019 is statistically significant if the 95% confidence interval for the RR does not include the value one, which is the case for January and for the period January-March as a whole.

Key Findings

- Overall, the rate of hospital-presenting self-harm to the 18 hospitals with available data was 6% lower in January-March 2021 than it was in the same period of 2018-2019.
- The lower rate in these months was due mainly to a 23% lower rate in January.
- Respectively, the rate in February and March 2021 was 3% lower and 9% higher than in the same months of 2018-2019

References

Sinyor M, Knipe D, Borges G, Ueda M, Pirkis J, Phillips MR, et al. Suicide Risk and Prevention During the COVID-19 Pandemic: One Year On. Archives of Suicide Research. 2021 Aug 23;0(0):1–6.

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For information on mental health support services, please visit: www.yourmentalhealth.ie