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**The Idaho Statesman**  
Boise, Idaho  
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by **Audrey Dutton**  
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## Idaho health system now asks about depression, suicide

St. Luke's Health System is now screening all patients for depression and suicide during their regular checkups with primary care physicians and clinics.

St. Luke's started to roll out the depression and suicide screenings in May.

Adult patients will be screened once a year, and patients ages 12 to 17 will be screened at every visit.

"This is a major step in starting to identify suicidal ideation," said Megan Stright, the St. Luke's Health System administrator of behavioral health. "We also believe this will help to start the process to finally break through the stigma associated with suicide, and even simply talking about suicide."

Idaho had the fifth-highest suicide rate in the U.S. last year, according to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. The hospital system said that recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data that show a 43 percent increase in suicide rates in Idaho between 1996 and 2016.

"Almost one person dies from suicide every day in Idaho," a news release from St. Luke's said.

Hospital officials hope the new protocol will help identify depression and suicidal thoughts in patients who might not otherwise reach out for help.

The screening starts with questions about mood, loss of interest in favorite activities, and thoughts of self-harm. For patients who say they have those symptoms, the screening moves on to questions about sleeplessness, loss of appetite and energy levels.

When health care providers refer patients to specialists for mental health problems, about half of patients never follow up. So in addition to the screenings, St. Luke's is adding behavioral health specialists to its family practice clinics.

"We also have psychiatrists and psychologists who can be an additional resource for our primary care providers, and walk them through what to do next, if a patient should need further screening and care," Stright said.

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