

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health visits in pediatric primary care

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A new study describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pediatric primary care mental health visits. Findings from the study will be presented during the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) 2022 Meeting, taking place April 21-25 in Denver.

Researchers with Boston Children's Hospital found that visits to

[pediatric primary care](#) offices for eating disorder and depressive and [bipolar disorder](#) began increasing significantly at the start of the pandemic period, whereas alcohol and substance use disorder visits immediately decreased in frequency and were less frequent over time.

These results reveal an increased burden of mental health care provision in the primary care office since the start of the pandemic and highlight the importance of screening for, provisionally diagnosing, and managing youth mental health conditions in primary care during periods of social isolation. Additional research is needed to further understand the impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health.

"We aimed to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pediatric mental health, specifically in terms of visits to primary care," said Jane Bittner Gould, MPH, CPH, senior project manager at Pediatric Physicians' Organization at Children's. "We conducted an interrupted time series analysis of in-network visits among our large pediatric network in Massachusetts. Our findings reveal significant changes in the pattern of visits to primary care offices for mental health conditions in children and adolescents: most notably, striking increases in visits for eating disorders and mood disorders during the pandemic period. Conversely, visits for alcohol and [substance use disorders](#) declined during the pandemic period."

Diagnosis	Visits per 1,000 patients per year		Level <i>P</i> -value	Slope <i>P</i> -value
	Pre-Pandemic	Pandemic		
Alcohol and Substance Use Disorders	5.8	5.5	<0.001	<0.001
Anxiety Disorders	156.1	210.0	0.85	0.89
Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders	211.1	216.5	0.41	0.56
Behavior Disorders	10.1	10.0	0.69	0.11
Depressive and Bipolar Disorders	65.3	94.0	0.86	<0.001
Eating Disorders	9.3	18.3	0.76	<0.001
Stress/Trauma Disorders	28.2	39.3	0.61	0.25

Rates of Pediatric Mental Health Visit Diagnoses in the Pre-Pandemic and
Pandemic Periods, with an ITS Analysis of Level and Slope

Changes
Abbreviation: ITS = Interrupted time series. Credit: Boston Children's
Hospital



Monthly Rates of Seven Pediatric Mental Health Visit Diagnoses, January 2019-September 2021 Symbol: Δ = Change. The white area represents the pre-pandemic (Jan 2019-Feb 2020); the dark gray represents the emergency pandemic period (Mar 2020-May 2020); and the light gray represents the pandemic period (Jun 2020-Sep 2021). P-values bolded in red highlight statistically significant changes. Credit: Boston Children's Hospital

The self-reported mental health impacts of the COVID- 19 pandemic on adults include increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Research on the impact of pandemic-related social changes on the [mental health](#) of children and adolescents is more limited.

More information: Conference: www.pas-meeting.org/

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