

# COVID-19 stress and remote schools worsened youth mental health

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A survey of over 32,000 caregivers of youth in Chicago Public Schools found that around a quarter of children and adolescents were described as stressed, anxious, angry or agitated after pandemic-related school closures and the switch to remote learning. Around a third of youth were described by caregivers as lonely and only one-third were described as having positive social and peer relationships. Across the board, caregivers reported significantly worse psychological well-being after school closures as compared to before. Findings were published in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

"Caregivers are reporting that the pandemic and [school](#) closures have taken a substantial emotional toll on their children and adolescents," said lead author Tali Raviv, Ph.D., clinical psychologist at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago Center for Childhood Resilience and Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Greater [public attention](#) to youth [mental health issues](#) during this time can help appropriately allocate resources and inform

policies to support the well-being of students as schools begin to reopen."

Among 350,000 families invited to participate, 32,217 caregivers completed the survey on behalf of nearly 50,000 children in prekindergarten through 12th grade. The survey was distributed from June 24 to July 15, 2020.

While COVID-19 related stressors were experienced by nearly all families in the survey, Black and Latinx participants experienced significantly more of these stressors. Increased exposure to COVID-19 related stressors was associated with poorer psychological well-being for children in the sample.

"The pandemic revealed to all what we've long known is true: schools are important community hubs that meet fundamental needs like access to food, health and mental health supports and services, as well as other kinds of protection," said co-senior author Kenneth Fox, MD, from the Chicago Public Schools. "While schools continue to meet those needs, we think they will also serve as sites of community healing where public health strategies and systems can converge and align to serve families in innovative ways. This convergence may be a powerful way to address the increased mental health needs the pandemic has wrought among our students, especially those from Black and Latinx communities, to ensure equitable access to support and care."

"These findings also present an important opportunity for collaboration across schools, [community organizations](#), and [academic institutions](#) to address the important emotional needs of students," said co-senior author Ruchi Gupta, MD, MPH, Director of the Center for Food Allergy & Asthma Research (CFAAR) at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. "With the ongoing impact of the COVID-19

pandemic, we look forward to working together to develop programs, resources, and interventions to support these needs."

**More information:** *JAMA Network Open* (2021).

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