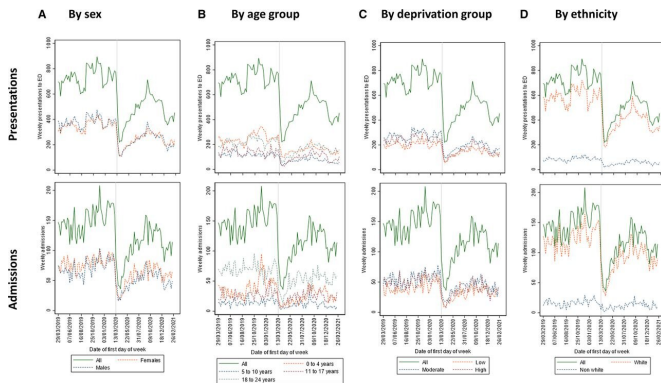


# Teenage girls visiting emergency departments with mental health concerns increased during the pandemic

8 September 2022



Weekly presentations and admissions before and during the pandemic. Presentations to emergency department and admissions by week for 1 year before (year 4) and after (year 5) the start of the pandemic (marked with gray line). Data presented for all and then split by (A) sex, (B) age group, (C) deprivation decile and (D) ethnicity. Credit: *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2022). DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2021-323389

The number of teenage girls attending emergency departments with mental health issues rose during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to new research by the University of Southampton.

The findings, published in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, show that more females aged from 11 to 17 went to hospital with mental health issues than would be expected. In the same period, [teenage boys](#) attending with mental health issues significantly reduced.

Professor Graham Roberts, Professor in Pediatric Allergy and Respiratory Medicine and a theme co-lead at the NIHR Southampton Biomedical Research Center, says that "this increase in mental health in young females is concerning."

## COVID-19 impact

The study assessed the [pandemic's](#) impact on medical, surgical, trauma and mental health conditions in children and young adults.

Professor Roberts, who led the study, says that "the impact of COVID-19 on older members of society is well-documented. But the impact of the pandemic on young people is less well-known."

"There were concerns about the negative impact on young people, so we looked at the number of young people attending hospital emergency departments during the first year of the pandemic."

"We compared it to the number we would have expected to see if the pandemic hadn't happened."

## Data from the University Hospital Southampton

The study took place at the University Hospital Southampton (UHS) [emergency department](#) and regional major trauma center.

Researchers analyzed data from 166,459 presentations over five years from April 2016, focusing only on patients aged under 25.

Overall, there was a 38.1% reduction in [young people](#) using the emergency department during the pandemic with no variation by sex, age, deprivation, or ethnicity.

However the research showed an increase in the number of 11-17-year-old females who attended with mental health issues during the first year of the pandemic. It also showed a large reduction in the number of males who attended with [mental health issues](#).

Professor Roberts says that "this may have been due to young females having fewer face-to-face interactions with friends, resulting in loneliness, and worsened mental health."

### Concerning trend

Researchers say the figures highlight a need to better understand how to support teenage [mental health](#), particularly around their exposure to digital media.

"There are big differences in digital use between adolescent males and females", Professor Roberts added.

"Boys tend to spend more time gaming, while girls spend more time on smartphones, [social media](#) and texting."

"Greater digital media use can cause lower well-being, and loneliness is often associated with females and older adolescents."

"We need to consider how we support these adolescents, especially with the increased exposure to [digital media](#) during the pandemic."

**More information:** Folasade Solanke et al, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on emergency department attendances for young people, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2022). [DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2021-323389](#)

Provided by University of Southampton

APA citation: Teenage girls visiting emergency departments with mental health concerns increased during the pandemic (2022, September 8) retrieved 8 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-09-teenage-girls-emergency-departments-mental.html>

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