



## **CDC finds lockdown had a negative effect on youth mental health**

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Being a teenager is hard, but data recently published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show it's become increasingly difficult. New statistics reveal the troubled state of mental health for high school students during the pandemic. Surveys were collected online by the CDC from approximately 7,700 students during the first half of 2021.

Preliminary data found mental health was getting worse and that the pandemic "created traumatic stressors that have the potential to further erode students' mental wellbeing," said Dr. Debra Houry, the CDC's acting principal deputy director.

More than a third of students reported poor mental health in 2021, 44% said they felt "persistently" sad or hopeless, and 29% said a parent or other adult in their home lost a job.

As quarantine measures expanded throughout the pandemic, many children were forced to remain in homes with prevalent family violence. The National Library of Medicine reported an increase in domestic abuse incidents of at least 21%. Most surveyed students said they experienced emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, and 11% experienced physical abuse.

The survey also discovered that 19.9% of students reported having seriously considered suicide, and 9% reported attempting it. LGBT youth reported poorer mental health and more suicide attempts than others.

In 2020, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 45,979 Americans died by suicide, and there were an estimated 1.2 million suicide attempts.

Due to mental health-related emergencies, visits to the emergency room rose by 31% for minors ages 12-17, especially girls. From Feb. 21 to March 20 in 2021, emergency visits following suicide attempts were 50.6% higher for girls and 3.7% for males.

These findings highlight the importance of regular schooling for youth mental health. Virtual instruction, mandated across the nation, compromised the ability to connect with teachers and peers, leading to a decline in performance in educational settings.

Dr. Jeff Singer, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a general surgeon, said the problems could be significantly attributed to the loss of connectedness.

"It's important to keep in mind that mental health problems among the youth were on the increase before the pandemic, and the causes are multifactorial. Dysfunctional family dynamics have contributed. But at the heart of the problem is a sense of isolation and loss of connectedness," he said.

"Social media can sometimes be a poor substitute for missing connectedness and can sometimes aggravate the situation," he added. "That said, the sudden and forced exacerbation of isolation that resulted from pandemic policy, especially school closures, canceling extracurricular activities, and closing off opportunities for personal social interaction, poured fuel on the fire. And we may see the effects of that damaging pandemic policy for years to come."

Despite the worsening of mental health problems due to social media access, social media has also provided a new means of social support for adolescents coping with the stress of the last three years. A 2022 study showed that the amount of time spent on social media was not directly associated with depression symptoms. Instead, social media afforded a valuable outlet that was able to connect students in a world that shut them out.

School closures for any period lead to social upheaval. Adolescents with mental health issues are more likely to struggle academically, have problems with decision-making, and face declines in physical health. As we begin to recover from the pandemic, schools will continue to be vital for supporting the health and safety of students.