

New research reveals 41 percent increase in children's short stay hospital admissions

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The number of children being admitted to hospitals in England for short stays increased by 41 per cent between 1996 and 2006, according to research published in *PLoS One* today. The authors of the study, from Imperial College London, say this increase may be linked to a shortfall in out-of-hours primary care services, but further research is needed before they can draw any firm conclusions.

The new research looked at unplanned hospital admissions of children aged under ten. While longer stays in hospital decreased by 12 per cent between 1996 and 2006, short stays of less than two days increased by 41 per cent. Overall, there was a 22 per cent increase in the rate of children's unplanned hospital admissions.

Dr Sonia Saxena from Imperial College London and her colleagues from St George's Healthcare NHS Trust and the UCL Institute of Child Health identified the five most common illnesses that led to short stay admissions in the ten year study period, which included [asthma](#), [abdominal pain](#), respiratory infections and fever. They say that, in many cases, illnesses like these are usually minor and could be treated in the community, rather than in hospital.

The researchers say there are many possible explanations for the increase in unplanned hospital admissions. However, they suggest that one cause may be that parents are taking their sick children to the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department because they are having problems accessing other services, such as their GP, outside normal working hours.

The new study did not examine whether the children had seen a GP before their hospital visit, or look in detail at the causes of admission. The researchers would now like to analyse just those cases that might be treatable in the community to establish whether there is a link between children

being admitted to hospital for non-serious illnesses and the provision of out-of-hours care.

Dr Saxena, from the Division of Epidemiology, Public Health & Primary Care at Imperial College London, said: "Our study suggests that too many children may be being admitted to hospital with minor illnesses. Short, unplanned stays in hospital are expensive for the health service and can be very disruptive for families, as well as putting the child at risk of hospital acquired infection unnecessarily.

"We believe our research has highlighted a problem in the healthcare system. Many of the minor illnesses that seem to be leading to [hospital admission](#), such as asthma and feverish illness, may be better dealt with by GPs in the community, where the [children](#) can receive better continuity of care," added Dr Saxena.

Source: Imperial College London ([news](#) : [web](#))

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