

# Pediatric emergency department visits for psychiatric care on the rise

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Pediatric patients, primarily those who are underinsured (either without insurance or receiving Medicaid), are increasingly receiving psychiatric care in hospital emergency departments (EDs), according to an abstract presented Friday, Oct. 14, at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) National Conference and Exhibition in Boston.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

Researchers reviewed ED data, including patient age, sex, race, ethnicity, [insurance status](#), and type of care received, from the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, between 1999 through 2007. The study, "Disproportionately Increasing Psychiatric Visits to the Pediatric Emergency Department Among the Underinsured," found that over eight years, 279 million pediatric patients were seen in U.S. EDs, of which 2.8 percent were for psychiatric visits. The prevalence of psychiatric visits among [pediatric patients](#) increased from 2.4 percent in 1999 to 3 percent in 2007. The underinsured group initially accounted for 46 percent of pediatric ED visits in 1999, growing to 54 percent in 2007.

The results of this study are important for several reasons. First, the data show that, as anticipated, psychiatric visits by children to emergency departments continue to increase in number and as a percentage of all patients being seen in emergency departments, said lead study author Zachary Pittsenbarger, MD. "A second, and more novel finding, is that one group in particular is increasing beyond any other socio-demographic group, and that is the publicly insured," he said.

"It has been found previously that the publicly insured have fewer treatment options and longer wait times for [psychiatric disorders](#) when not hospitalized," Dr. Pittsenbarger said. "This new finding argues that limited outpatient mental health resources force those patients to seek the care they need in the emergency department."

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