

## Study: Transgender teens with school bathroom restrictions are at greater risk of sexual assault

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Transgender and gender non-binary teens (whose gender identity is not male or female) have a greater risk of sexual assault when their school restricts which restroom or locker room they can use, according to a new study.

Increasingly, school districts have been grappling with whether to allow students to use the bathroom of the gender they identify with even if it's not the gender they were assigned at birth.

Researchers aimed to quantify rates of sexual assault among sexual minority teens and to see if bathroom restrictions were linked to safety. To do so, they analyzed survey data on 3,673 of these teens from the 2017 LGBTQ Teen Study, an anonymous web-based survey, and reported the results in "School Restroom/Locker Rooms Restrictions and Sexual Assault Risk Among Transgender Youth," (Murchison GR, et al. *Pediatrics*. May 6, 2019, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/05/02/peds.2018-2902>).

About 26% of the teens reported that they were sexually assaulted in the past 12 months, with the highest rates among non-binary teens assigned female at birth and transgender boys. Their rate of assault is well above what previous studies have found for teens who are not sexual minorities — 15% for girls and 4% for boys.

The sexual assault rates are even higher for sexual minorities whose schools impose bathroom or locker room restrictions at 36%.

Researchers looked in more detail at the risks for sexual assault among teens with the same gender identity and sex assigned at birth but differences in bathroom restrictions. Adjusted results showed the risk was 2.49 times higher for restricted transgender girls, 1.42 times higher for restricted non-binary youths assigned female at birth and 1.26 times higher for restricted transgender boys. Non-binary youths assigned male at birth did not have an increased risk of assault based on bathroom restrictions.

Authors noted the results were limited by 90% of the respondents being assigned female at birth and a lack of racial diversity. They also said the results do not prove bathroom restrictions cause sexual assaults. Restrictions may be linked to safety more broadly or to a risk of sexual harassment that may progress to sexual assault. They also may “out” teens as transgender.

“Besides avoiding restrictive policies, schools should strongly consider designating ‘all-gender restrooms,’ along with additional adult supervision in locations where harassment is most likely to occur, training staff to intervene in anti-LGBTQ bullying, and offering privacy options (e.g., curtains) in locker rooms,” authors wrote.

Pediatricians can help by screening adolescents for sexual assault, providing emotional support and referrals, and educating school officials on the needs of gender minority students, according to the study.

Authors of a [related commentary](#) called on more states to follow California’s model of allowing public school students to choose the bathroom and locker room that matches their gender identity.

“The findings of this study make a compelling case for what we as gender specialist providers witness every day in our work; failure to support transgender and gender expansive youth in being able to fully live in their affirmed gender puts them at physical as well as psychological risk,” they wrote.

## **Resources**

- [AAP policy “Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth”](#)
- [AAP Section on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health and Wellness](#)
- [Information for parents on transgender children](#)

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