



Supplement in *Pediatrics* looks at issues adolescents face due to pandemic

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While the COVID-19 pandemic affected the health of nearly every age group, it continues to present challenges for adolescents.

A supplement in the April issue of *Pediatrics* highlights everyday health issues, challenges and developmental transitions that adolescent patients have faced during the global public health challenge. The supplement “Utilizing the Pandemic to Reframe Adolescent Health,” from the AAP Section on Adolescent Health, is available at <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/issue/151/Supplement%201>.

Articles focus on sexual health, mental health, racism/policing, civic engagement and the impact of 21st Century Cures Act on confidentiality. The supplement was co-edited by Maria E. Trent, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, and Paritosh Kaul, M.D., M.B.B.S., FAAP.

“Recognizing the impact of recent events and enduring challenges on adolescent health will be critical for pediatricians (to) effectively support parents and guide adolescent patients through this critical phase of their life,” they wrote in the introduction to the supplement. “As such, the supplement leads with a framework for connecting with adolescents and reminds us about the return on investing the time needed to help them fulfill the enormous potential of adolescence.”

Among the topics addressed in the supplement is the Cures Act, which is meant to increase patients’ access to, use and exchange of health information in their electronic health records (EHRs). There is concern, however, about its impact on confidentiality of health information.

“The lack of adequate controls, the protection of the health information system, the lack of clarity around preventing harm and the exception to information blocking all are going to have challenges for pediatricians,”

Dr. Kaul said. “We just have to work together to take care of that.”

The pandemic’s impact on sexual health also has been at the forefront of care. Recent data suggest that sexually transmitted infections continued to increase during the first year of the pandemic, while access to resources for care and testing was diminished to help control the spread of COVID-19.

Additional articles focus on systemic issues that impact adolescent health and well-being. Articles on racism and policing address these issues, while others highlight how many adolescents found their voice for civic engagement.

Dr. Kaul pointed to an article a parent wrote about her child with autism going to vote for the first time. “I think that is something really cool for the pediatricians to understand is that voice of the parent. It’s also kind of inspiring.”

Two articles address the emotional well-being of adolescents, including the exacerbation of the mental and behavioral health crisis during the pandemic.

Dr. Kaul said routine mental health screenings should be part of all appointments, physicals and routine examinations. Pediatricians also may be able to connect parents and caregivers with resources to address family mental health challenges.

“We all need to accept and understand our commitment and understanding that mental health is an essential part overall,” Dr. Kaul said. “Those who experience mental health challenges, they actually need our support, our grace and compassion instead of stigma and bias. There are pre-existing mental health challenges that got exacerbated with COVID. So, if I have a mother who’s depressed or a father who’s struggling with substance abuse, I can refer them so there’s a combined effort, which I think is going to be critical.”