

Children's hospitals admissions for suicidal thoughts, actions double during past decade

May 4, 2017

Article type: [PAS Meeting Updates](#)

Topics: [Adolescent Health/Medicine](#), [Psychiatry/Psychology](#)

SAN FRANCISCO – The number of children and adolescents admitted to children's hospitals for thoughts of suicide or self-harm more than doubled during the last decade, according to new research being presented at the 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in San Francisco.

Researchers will present the study abstract, "Trends in Suicidality and Serious Self-Harm for Children 5-17 Years at 32 U.S. Children's Hospitals, 2008-2015," on Sunday, May 7, at the Moscone West Convention Center.

The study included administrative data from 32 children's hospitals across the U.S. and identified all emergency department and inpatient encounters between 2008 and 2015 for children between 5 and 17 years old with a discharge diagnosis of suicidality or serious self-harm.

The researchers found a total of 118,363 such encounters at the children's hospitals during the period studied. Further analysis showed the annual percentage of all encounters identified as suicidality or self-harm more than doubled over the study period, increasing from 0.67% in 2008 to 1.79% in 2015.

Slightly more than half the patients with suicidal thoughts or actions (totaling 59,631) were with 15- to 17-year-olds, while 36.9% (43,682) were with 12- to 14-year-olds. An additional 12.7% (15,050) of the encounters were with children between ages 5 and 11.

Significant increases were noted in all age groups but were higher among the older children, said lead author Gregory Plemmons, M.D., an associate professor of pediatrics at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Teens between ages 15 and 17 had an average annual increase of 0.27 percentage points, and 12- to 14-year-olds an average of 0.25% each year. This compares to 0.02% for 5- to 11-year-olds.

The study also revealed seasonal variations in the suicidality and self-harm cases, with the lowest percentage occurring during summer (June through August) and the highest during spring (March through May) and fall (September through November).

Plemmons said the study's finding echo trends identified in recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Research to understand factors contributing to these alarming trends is urgently needed," Dr. Plemmons said, adding that awareness of these trends is also critical for staff preparedness at children's hospitals.

Dr. Plemmons will present the abstract, "Trends in Suicidality and Serious Self-Harm for Children 5-17 Years at 32 U.S. Children's Hospitals, 2008-2015," beginning at 4:15 p.m. The abstract is available at https://registration.pas-meeting.org/2017/reports/rptPAS17_Abstracts.asp.

The Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) Meeting brings together thousands of individuals united by a common mission: to improve child health and well-being worldwide. This international gathering includes pediatric researchers, leaders in academic pediatrics, experts in child health, and practitioners. The PAS Meeting is produced through a partnership of four organizations leading the advancement of pediatric research and child advocacy: Academic Pediatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Pediatric Society, and Society for Pediatric Research. For more information, visit the PAS Meeting online at www.pas-meeting.org, follow us on Twitter @PASMeeting and #pasm17, or like us on Facebook. For additional AAP News coverage, visit <http://www.aappublications.org/collection/pas-meeting-updates>.

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