

# The State of Our Children: Kids and COVID-19



May 3, 2021

As more Valley counties move to the orange tier and vaccinations continue, there is reason for optimism and a need for a deepening resolve to continue our forward progress. May is Mental Health Awareness Month and this issue is dedicated to the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of our children.

**This is the state of our children for the week of May 3, 2021.**

## Kids, COVID-19 and Mental Health

**Dr. Michael Danovsky, Manager, Pediatric Psychology • Dr. Amanda Suplee, Pediatric Psychology**

By now, we are well aware of the impacts of COVID-19 on children. From the more than 58,000 kids in our Valley who have had COVID-19, to those who have lost a grandparent or family member to the virus, many have missed out on school, celebrations and traditional childhood milestones like the first day of kindergarten and senior prom. The mental health impacts due to COVID-19 have been described as the “second wave” of the pandemic.

We have certainly seen the effects at Valley Children’s with an increase of patients across all ages experiencing anxiety, depression and somatic symptoms such as pain, headaches, stomachaches and problems with sleeping. Kids react to the things around them - the actions they see and/or feel, such as stress and irritability, are quickly picked up on and can manifest into the kind of distress we are commonly finding among children.

Our emergency department has also seen an increase in children who have attempted or considered suicide during the pandemic. This is even more prevalent in teenagers who are already at higher risk of depression and anxiety because of their better understanding of stresses within their household, community and world around them.

It is important to talk to children about their mental health and take seriously any signs (verbal and nonverbal) that may be of concern. Parents and guardians are urged to consult with their child’s pediatrician, teachers or school counselors who can conduct a thorough evaluation or provide resources. We have bolstered resources, tips and information to provide extra support to our patients, families, providers and each other at [valleychildrens.org/mentalhealth](http://valleychildrens.org/mentalhealth).

We have seen our community work together to increase access to mental health services for kids and families. There is still much to be done and we look forward to continued partnerships within our communities to support each other through the mental health impacts of COVID-19.



## From the Literature: An estimated 40,000 Children have lost a parent to COVID-19

In a research letter published in JAMA Pediatrics, researchers from Stony Brook University, University of Southern California, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Western Ontario estimate that, "40,000 children in the U.S. have lost a parent to COVID-19, a tragedy disproportionately impacting Black children."

As we consider the impacts of COVID-19 on a child's overall mental health, researchers call for increased awareness of and attention to those children who have suffered a loss of a parent from the pandemic as they return to school, church and neighborhoods.

"To calculate the parental losses, the team created a statistical model taking into account the number of deaths from COVID-19 since February 2020 and demographics of those who have died. They determined **about one in every 13 deaths resulted in a child under 18 losing a parent.**

As of February 2021, there were 479,000 recorded deaths. When deaths indirectly linked to the pandemic are included, that figure grows to 552,000. Using their statistical model, researchers determined roughly **37,000 to 43,000 youths have lost a parent.** About three-quarters of those experiencing parental loss are adolescents.

The losses are about 18% to 20% higher than a typical year, according to the letter. Authors also noted disparities in the deaths, estimating Black children experienced about 20% of the losses but only 14% of the population."<sup>1</sup>

The loss of a loved one has also posed a significant disruption to a child's grieving process. As the world around them shut down and large gatherings were avoided, traditional rituals such as a funeral or the opportunity to say "goodbye" to someone in their last days was likely postponed or not possible at all, thus inhibiting a child's ability to seek closure.

Additionally, many children certainly did not have access to their usual support networks of families, friends, teachers and faith leaders during the pandemic, requiring all of us to be particularly aware of, and to screen for, these significant events surrounding kids.

### Sources:

1. AAP News & Journals Gateway. Estimated 40,000 children have lost a parent to COVID-19. (April 5, 2021). <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2021/04/05/children-losing-parents-covid-040521>
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. Interim Guidance on Supporting the Emotional and Behavioral Health Needs of Children, Adolescents and Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic. (March 20, 2021). <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/interim-guidance-on-supporting-the-emotional-and-behavioral-health-needs-of-children-adolescents-and-families-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

### About 360me

As healthcare professionals, parents, families and community members, we know our health depends on our physical health as well as our mental well-being. In honor of May as Mental Health Awareness Month, Valley Children's has launched 360me: an initiative to help safeguard children's mental and physical health.



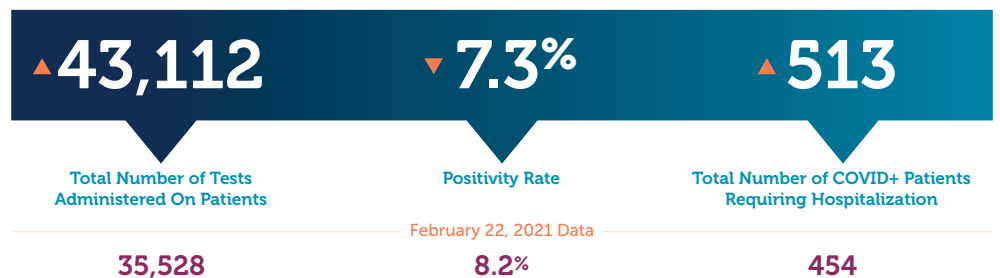
Mental health is just as important as physical health.

360me reminds us all to take care of our children's physical and mental health. Engage children in a conversation about how they're feeling – a proven foundation for a lifetime of mental wellness. Take children to the pediatrician and catch up on well-child visits and vaccinations that might have been missed during COVID-19.

The heart of the 360me campaign can be found at [valleychildrens.org/360me](http://valleychildrens.org/360me) and includes resources for how parents can begin the conversation with their kids about mental health, mindfulness and stress reduction activities and more. We invite you to learn more about how Valley Children's advocates for every degree of child wellness and what you can do to help start the conversation.

### Current Data and Trends

Across Valley Children's Healthcare Network  
(as of April 26, 2021)



For more information visit [valleychildrens.org/covid19](http://valleychildrens.org/covid19) or email [contactus@valleychildrens.org](mailto:contactus@valleychildrens.org)