

The State of Our Children: COVID-19 and Kids



April 8, 2022

As we continue to see declining COVID-19 cases – while keeping an eye on new and emerging variants – we remain focused on the impact of this pandemic on our kids, new research, updated guidance on vaccines and more.

This is the state of our children for April 8, 2022.

When an infectious disease comes face-to-face with mental health challenges in our kids

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Our care for kids at Valley Children's is focused on the "whole child" – that is, their physical, mental and spiritual well-being on their journey to good health. Infectious disease physicians have focused on COVID-19, its transmission, treatment and prevention. But the attention to the "whole child" has never been more clear than during this pandemic, as evidenced by the latest research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on an issue we share with colleagues in pediatric psychology.

A recent study¹ by the CDC observed emergency department (ED) visits by children ages 0-17 who presented with mental health conditions (MHC) such as depression, anxiety, disruptive behavioral and impulse-control disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, trauma and stressor-related disorders, bipolar disorders, eating disorders, tic disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD). When comparing ED visits during the pandemic (March 2020 through Jan. 2022) to 2019, visits for overall MHCs among all children and adolescents accounted for a larger proportion of all pediatric ED visits during 2020, 2021 and Jan. 2022 with variation by age group and MHC. Among this population, the study found that teen girls ages 12-17 had the largest increase in visits for mental health conditions, and in particular, eating disorders doubled and tic disorders tripled.

Throughout the pandemic, Valley Children's has also seen an increase in the calls for consultations for mental health issues in our ED, as well as in our primary care practices. That is not surprising given that counties in the Central Valley have some of the highest rates of students experiencing depression-related feelings. As an example, more than one third of ninth graders in Kern, Merced and Stanislaus counties reported having these feelings in the last year.

This study and the trends we are seeing throughout our own region highlight the need for continued awareness and vigilance in observing any signs in our children and teens that could arise from emotional distress. Valley Children's continues to work toward comprehensive efforts to prevent, identify and address mental health conditions among children and teens by clinicians, families and schools. For more information on mental health resources, tips and information to provide extra support, consult a primary care provider or visit valleychildrens.org/mentalhealth. If there is an emergency, dial 911.

¹Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic – United States, January 2019–January 2022 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7108e2.htm?s_cid=mm7108e2_w

Kids and vaccines: Current status

A recent CDC study² evaluating the efficacy of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination in children and adolescents found that vaccination protects against COVID-19 and reduces urgent care visits for children and teens.

The report also found that the vaccination protects against COVID-19-associated hospitalizations in teens. Although the reduction in ED and urgent care visits among teens decreased over time as more kids were infected with the Omicron variant, the protection among 16 and 17-year-olds who received a booster increased to 81%.

Another recent CDC report² studied the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine booster safety data in about 2.8 million adolescents ages 12–17 years, and found no unusual or unexpected patterns of adverse events which continues to confirm the safety of the vaccine. Serious adverse events, including myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), were rare. The study also looked at reactions reported to v-safe, a voluntary smartphone-based safety monitoring system, and found that most reactions, such as arm pain or tiredness, were mild to moderate.

These two studies further highlight the importance of receiving the recommended vaccinations and boosters for all eligible individuals ages 5 and older to help protect against severe illness and hospitalization associated with COVID-19. For information on vaccines and clinic availability, visit myturn.ca.gov.

²Effectiveness of COVID-19 Pfizer-BioNTech BNT162b2 mRNA Vaccination in Preventing COVID-19–Associated Emergency Department and Urgent Care Encounters and Hospitalizations Among Nonimmunocompromised Children and Adolescents Aged 5–17 Years — VISION Network, 10 States, April 2021–January 2022

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7109e3.htm?s_cid=mm7109e3_w

³Safety Monitoring of COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Doses Among Persons Aged 12–17 Years — United States, December 9, 2021–February 20, 2022 https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7109e2.htm?s_cid=mm7109e2_w

Monthly data and trends across the Valley Children's Healthcare network (ages 0-20)

(as of Mar. 28, 2022)

	Tests Administered	Positive Tests	Positivity Rate	Hospitalizations
Dec. 6 – Jan. 2	▼ 4,032	▼ 130 (99*)	▼ 3.2%	▼ 14
Jan. 3 – Jan. 30	5,820	1,577 (1,013*)	27.1%	45
Jan. 31 – Feb. 27	5,020	546 (307*)	10.9%	29
Feb. 28 – Mar. 27	3,603	97 (39*)	2.7%	17

*COVID+ patients in Valley Children's Emergency Department

WEAR A MASK • WASH/SANITIZE HANDS • GET VACCINATED



For more information visit valleychildrens.org/covid19
or email contactus@valleychildrens.org