

Racial disparities evident in taking sexual histories in emergency departments

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Emergency department physicians are more likely to document sexual histories of black adolescent girls with symptoms potentially related to sexually transmitted infections (STI) than white teen girls with the same symptoms, according to a new study.

The result is that emergency physicians may be providing less comprehensive services for white teen girls than black, according to Carolyn Holland, M.D., M.Ed., a pediatric emergency medicine fellow at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and the study's lead author.

The study will be presented today at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies in Vancouver, Canada.

"We typically see [racial disparities](#) that result in poor-quality health care for non-whites," says Dr. Holland. "In this situation, we're doing white patients a disservice by not asking whether they've had sex. The simple fact is that any girl of any race who comes to a hospital for emergency care - or to her primary care physician for that matter - should be asked whether they're having sex. We're not doing a good job of that."

U.S. Centers for Disease Control data show that black teen girls have a higher incidence of STIs and sexual activity than white girls, but it's not standard of care to document sexual histories more or less frequently for one group than another, according to Dr. Holland.

In her study, Dr. Holland examined 352 emergency visits. Ninety-one percent of black teens had their sexual history documented. Only 62 percent of white teens had their sexual history taken.

Dr. Holland also is an [emergency physician](#) at the University of Cincinnati.

Provided by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

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