

More ADHD drugs, fewer antibiotics for US kids: study

June 18 2012, by Kerry Sheridan

More drugs for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and fewer antibiotics are being prescribed to US children and teenagers compared to a decade ago, said a US study on Monday.

Also, contraceptive [prescriptions](#) soared 93 percent from 2002 to 2010, though the reasons for the rise remain unclear, said the research published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Overall, prescriptions for kids ages 0-17 dropped seven percent during that time period, while [prescription drugs](#) dispensed to adults rose 22 percent, it said.

"Children are experiencing fewer serious [medical problems](#) than perhaps they had in the past," said Victor Fornari, director of child and adolescent psychiatry at North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System in New York.

The report tracked the number of prescriptions dispensed for the youths, not the number of patients, and was based on two major US commercial prescription databases.

A key rise was seen in stimulant medications for [ADHD](#), which the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention describes as one of the most common neurobehavioral conditions of childhood, affecting about five million children.

ADHD diagnoses have been rising in recent years, and Fornari said the 46 percent rise in ADHD prescriptions noted in the Pediatrics study was likely in keeping with the higher number of cases.

"Given the prevalence of these disorders it is likely to reflect a greater awareness and recognition of these conditions and an understanding of the negative impact of failing to treat ADHD," Fornari told AFP.

"That failure to treat results in lower [academic achievement](#), a greater rate of conduct disorders, earlier entry into substance abuse and a higher likelihood of entering the [juvenile justice system](#) or the [criminal justice system](#)," added Fornari, who was not involved in the study.

"There has been a much greater awareness that you want to treat ADHD early to prevent the bad outcome. I think this increase may reflect that."

Overall, the most frequently dispensed drugs were antibiotics, accounting for about a quarter of all pediatric prescriptions between 2002 and 2010, said the report.

However, the data showed a 14 percent decline in antibiotic dispensing over that period, which Kenneth Bromberg, chairman of Pediatrics at The Brooklyn Hospital Center in New York, described as good news.

"Almost no one is chronically on antibiotics," said Bromberg, who also was not involved with the research.

"It suggests the use of antibiotics for ambulatory type things has gone down, which is very good," he added.

"The more we cut back on unnecessary antibiotic use in humans, the better off we will be in terms of antibiotic resistance."

Other notable findings included a 42 percent drop in prescription medications for coughs and colds, a 14 percent rise in asthma meds, and a 93 percent spike in prescriptions for contraceptives like birth control pills.

The study could not explain the reasons behind the increase, but suggested it could be a result of youths taking pills for longer periods of time -- which was not measured in the research -- or for secondary reasons like acne prevention.

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