

Children hospitalized for injuries have increased mental health needs

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There's no doubt that serious injuries can be stressful for families. But little is known about the impact of these injuries on children's mental health. A new study from the Center for Injury Research and Policy, the Center for Pediatric Trauma Research, and the Center for Suicide Prevention and Research at Nationwide Children's Hospital looked at mental health and social functioning of children after they were hospitalized for an injury.

The study, published today in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, looked at [children](#) ages 0-18 years who were hospitalized for unintentional injuries at Nationwide Children's from June 2005 through May 2015. All children in this study were enrolled in the hospital's managed-Medicaid program, which allowed evaluation of baseline [mental health](#). Researchers found that children hospitalized for an injury had on average a 63% increase in mental health diagnoses and a 155% increase in medications prescribed to treat a mental illness.

Children under four years old with burns and children of all ages with head injuries were at greatest risk for new mental health diagnoses after injury. The rate increases were most notable for stress-related conditions including adjustment disorders, [disruptive behavior disorders](#), eating disorders, learning disorders, and sleep disorders.

"We expect children to show a certain amount of stress and discomfort as a result of spending time in the hospital for an injury," said Dr. Julie Leonard, associate director of the Center for Pediatric Trauma Research,

principal investigator in the Center for Injury Research and Policy, and senior author of this study. "When we look back at medical records, it's clear that there are often serious mental health concerns after children go home. We, as healthcare providers, need to do a better job assessing children for mental health needs, identifying high-risk children, and referring them to [mental health providers](#) before sending them home."

Behavioral health providers suggest that these findings mean parents also need to be vigilant after their child sustains an [injury](#). "If your child is behaving differently - for example, not sleeping well, experiencing changes in behavior or mood, or struggling to focus in school - talk to your pediatrician or seek help from a behavioral [health](#) specialist," said Sarah VerLee, Ph.D., psychologist at Nationwide Children's.

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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