

First Nations children and youth experiencing more pain than non-First Nations children

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First Nations children and youth are experiencing more pain than non-First Nations children, but do not access specialist or mental health services at the same rate as their non-First Nations peers, found new research published in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"Both physical pain and mental health conditions, and their relation to each other, are of substantial concern within the Indigenous population, given that Health Canada reports First Nations youth are 5-7 times more likely to [die by] suicide than non-First Nations youth," writes Dr. Margot Latimer, Dalhousie University & IWK Health Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia, with coauthors.

The study looked at data on 2631 First Nations and non-First Nations [children](#) and youth aged 17 years and younger who accessed care and specialist treatment for pain in Atlantic Canada between 1997 and 2015. Compared with non-First Nations children, the proportion of First Nations children and youth who sought treatment for 10 out of 13 pain indicators was higher. These included admissions to the neonatal intensive care unit, diagnoses of dental and ear conditions, headache, burns, diabetes, wounds and fractures.

The finding of many diagnoses of painful ear and dental conditions was consistent with other research, although the lower percentages of visits to certain specialists by the First Nations group was unexpected.

Although the researchers found an association between early physical pain and mental diagnoses in non-First Nations adolescents, they did not find it in the First Nations cohort. They suggest this may be because of lack of mental health services and long wait times leading to delayed diagnoses.

They call for action to address these disparities.

"Given the profound lingering impact of colonization, First Nation newborns, children and youth are a group requiring high-priority designation to create policies to improve access to health services focusing on pain and mental health assessment, management and follow-up," write the authors.

"Occurrence of and referral to specialists for pain-related diagnoses in First Nations and non-First Nations children and youth" is published December 10, 2018.

More information: Margot Latimer et al, Occurrence of and referral to specialists for pain-related diagnoses in First Nations and non-First Nations children and youth, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.180198](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.180198)

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