

# Study suggests link between pediatric hospitalization and rising unemployment

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Pediatric hospitalization rates increase when unemployment levels rise, suggests a National Institutes of Health-funded analysis of data from 14 states spanning 12 years. For every 1% increase in unemployment,

researchers saw a 5% increase in hospitalizations for substance abuse, a 4% increase for diabetes, a 2% increase for poisoning and burns, and a 2% increase for children with medical complexity—those with a high need for prescriptions, medical equipment or services. Pediatric hospitalization rates for all causes increased by 2% for every 1% increase in unemployment.

Researchers analyzed county-level unemployment data every three years from 2002 to 2014 for Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont and Washington. They hypothesized that for children with diabetes and other forms of medical complexity, reductions in household finances would lead to foregoing medical services, thereby increasing hospitalizations. Poor housing conditions, brought on by income reductions, might increase poisonings and burns, and increased household stress resulting from lack of parental employment might increase substance use disorders.

The study was conducted by Jeffrey D. Colvin, M.D., Children's Mercy Hospital, in Kansas City, Missouri, and colleagues. It appears in *Health Affairs* and was funded by NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The authors concluded that more research is needed to understand how to potentially offset the declining health conditions brought on during economic downturns.

**More information:** Jeffrey D. Colvin et al. Economy-Sensitive Conditions: Are Some Pediatric Hospitalizations Triggered By Economic Recessions?, *Health Affairs* (2020). [DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00732](https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00732)

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