

Primary care visits dropped in early months of the pandemic

October 5 2020



(HealthDay)—There has been a decrease in primary care office visits

during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a study published online Oct. 2 in *JAMA Network Open*.

G. Caleb Alexander, M.D., from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, and colleagues quantified national changes in the volume, type, and content of primary care delivered during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) by examining outpatient care from the first calendar quarter (Q1) of 2018 to Q2 of 2020.

The researchers found that between 122.4 million and 130.3 million quarterly primary care visits occurred in the United States in the eight calendar quarters between Jan. 1, 2018, and Dec. 31, 2019; 92.9 percent of these were office-based. The total number of encounters decreased to 117.9 and 99.3 million in Q1 and Q2 of 2020, respectively, representing a decrease of 21.4 percent from the average Q2 levels in 2018 and 2019. There was a 50.2 percent decrease in office-based visits in Q2 of 2020 from Q2 of 2018 to 2019, while [telemedicine visits](#) increased from 1.1 to 4.1 and 35.3 percent of visits in Q2 2018 to 2019, Q1 2020, and Q2 2020, respectively. Compared with Q2 2018 to 2019 levels, in Q2 2020, there was a 50.1 percent decrease in blood pressure level assessment and a 36.9 percent decrease in cholesterol level assessment; assessment was less common during telemedicine versus office-based visits.

"These results indicate that there has been a significant decline in primary care use, at least in the early phases of the pandemic, and that [telemedicine](#) is an imperfect substitute for many office-based consultations," Alexander said in a statement.

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Citation: Primary care visits dropped in early months of the pandemic (2020, October 5)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-primary-early-months-pandemic.html>

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