

# Young epilepsy patients may benefit from mental health screening

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(HealthDay)—Depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts are more

common in children and teens with epilepsy than previously known, and they should be screened for such problems, researchers report.

They assessed 119 [children](#) and teens, aged 9 to 18, with [epilepsy](#). None had been diagnosed with depression, anxiety or [suicidal thoughts](#) (suicidality).

The screenings showed that about 30% of the youngsters had anxiety, nearly 40% had depression, and nearly 11% tested positive for suicidality, according to the study to be presented Friday at the virtual American Epilepsy Society annual meeting. Such research is considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

A previous study found that 19% of youngsters with epilepsy have anxiety and 13% have depression.

"Compared to other studies, the percentage of children, adolescents and teens that screened positive for these [mental health issues](#) was quite a bit higher than expected," said study author Dr. Anjali Dagar, a clinical research fellow at Cleveland Clinic.

In the [general population](#), about 7% of 2- to 17-year-olds have anxiety and 3% have depression, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There are no clear statistics on suicidality among children and youth in that age range who haven't been diagnosed with depression.

Most studies of suicidality in youths with epilepsy have been in children with preexisting [psychiatric diagnoses](#), the researchers noted.

They said this study is the first to assess screening for suicidality in youngsters with epilepsy with no known mental health history. The findings suggest that all children and teens with epilepsy would benefit

from screening, even if they have no signs of problems, according to the researchers.

"Although this is a screening—meaning the diagnosis must be confirmed by a psychiatrist—our findings suggest it is important to screen all youths with epilepsy for underlying psychiatric issues even when there are no signs of concern," Dagar said in a meeting news release.

"The suicide [screening] tool revealed unrecognized suicidality in more than 1 of 10 youths with epilepsy, which is significant," said study co-author Dr. Tatiana Falcone, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Cleveland Clinic Epilepsy Center. "Suicidality is a life-threatening condition that can exist even in the absence of a preexisting diagnosis of [depression](#) or anxiety, so it's important all children, adolescents and teens with epilepsy get screened for all three mental health issues."

**More information:** The Epilepsy Foundation has more on [epilepsy and mental health](#).

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