

# Young children may be at higher risk of long-term negative effects due to COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic has potentially made a lifelong impact on children aged five and under according to a new study published in the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*.

Experiencing adverse events, including disease outbreaks, [civil conflict](#)

[natural disasters](#) and food scarcity before age five years is associated with long-lasting [negative impacts](#) on [health](#), education and relationships, young [children](#) are highly vulnerable and will need to be monitored for developmental and behavior health issues and supported throughout their lives. A potential delay of 2-4 years may be observed between the initial presentation of symptomatic experiences and the development of a mental health disorder, meaning that while we may be seeing some of the initial effects of the pandemic, we will continue to see more over the next 2-4 years.

"In helping children and teens recover from the COVID-19 pandemic we need to come together as providers and families to identify struggles early and provide compassionate care and support. This process has only just begun, and we can expect the work to keep going as our youngest children may have effects not identified right away," said Dr. Nicole Bartek DNP, APRN, PMHNP, lead author of the study.

Also of concern, a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) identifies the COVID-19 pandemic as a "double jeopardy" for Black and Hispanic families because they were already at higher risk for inadequate care, and the stress on resources during the pandemic disproportionately increased that risk.

The economic stress of COVID-19 also increases stress on those who are at higher risk for developing mental illness. The lack of access to food and basic household supplies, out of real or perceived scarcity, was heightened during the initial phases of the pandemic lockdown measures.

Teens were at risk as well. Loneliness, despite many families being confined together during the pandemic, is an issue for teens and children making them more likely to develop symptoms of depression and anxiety that can persist post-[pandemic](#).

"In the coming months and years, we can help our children's and teens' recovery by encouraging them in developing and maintaining [daily routines](#) around sleeping, eating and taking care of their bodies," said Dr. Bartek. "When teens are not able to keep to a routine, with appropriate support from their parents or caregivers, it can be a sign that the [teen](#) is struggling and may need more help."

The article, titled "Addressing the Clinical Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health" was published in the July/August edition of the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*.

**More information:** Nicole Bartek et al, Addressing the Clinical Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health, *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.pedhc.2021.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2021.03.006)

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