

# COVID-19 stay at home orders brought uptick in child abuse

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The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, including financial strain and physical distancing, presented challenges for families that may have led to an increase in physical abuse injuries of school-aged children, according to new research.

The study abstract, "Impact of 'Stay-at-Home' Orders on Non-Accidental Trauma: A Multi-Institutional Study," to be presented at the virtual American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition, compared trauma registry data for March-September 2020 from nine pediatric trauma centers, against the same period in 2016-2019.

Researchers found an increase in child [abuse](#) victims over age 5 in 2020.

"The findings of our study may reflect the difference in how schools and daycares are viewed. In many areas, daycares were considered essential businesses and remained open during the shutdown. It is possible this is why we didn't see a large change in suspected abuse rates in the younger age group. However, with [older children](#) out of school and many parents financially vulnerable during this time, family dynamics may have escalated to oftentimes untenable situations," said Amelia Collings, MD, the abstract author and Midwest Pediatric Surgery Consortium (MWPS) Research Fellow. "We need to be able to provide support for these families and safeguard against feelings of desperation."

Researchers analyzed data on 39,331 pediatric trauma patients, of which 2,064 were victims of suspected abuse. Among children aged 5 years and older, the number of child abuse victims tripled during the study period, to 103 patients, up from an average of 36 patients during a similar period before the pandemic. For school-aged children, the increase in potentially abuse-related injuries may reflect the absence of normal safeguards provided by the educational system, teachers and [social workers](#) who have [direct access](#) to the child at school, potentially leaving a vulnerable population at risk.

"Economic and [emotional stress](#), in addition to the absence of other adults in the child's life that would typically recognize and report abuse, may have contributed to increased rates of child abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic," Dr. Collings said. "While [school-aged children](#) were sheltered at home, teachers, [health care workers](#), coaches, and

other adults outside the family were not there to notice signs of physical abuse."

Dr. Collings will present the study abstract at 9:15 a.m. CT Saturday, October 9, 2021.

This study was supported and conducted through the Midwest Pediatric Surgery Consortium, a collaborative of surgeon investigators from 11 children's hospitals dedicated to advancing the care of pediatric patients.

**More information:** A related abstract, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pediatric Non-Accidental Trauma," will be presented at 4:48 p.m. CT Friday, October 8, 2021.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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