

Many US high school kids report sadness, stress, abuse during pandemic

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If there's any doubt that America's teens have suffered mightily during

the pandemic, a new government survey offers fresh proof of the pain restrictions from the coronavirus has inflicted on this vulnerable group.

Many [high schoolers](#) have experienced physical and emotional abuse, poor mental health and chronic sadness and hopelessness as COVID-19 raged across the country for the past two years, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

"Our data make it clear that young people experienced significant disruption and adversity during the pandemic and are experiencing a [mental health crisis](#)," report author Kathleen Ethier, director of the CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health, said during a Thursday media briefing on the report.

"We found that over a third of students reported stress, anxiety and depression during the pandemic, and 44% of students said that in the previous year they had felt so persistently sad and hopeless that they were unable to engage in their regular activities," she said.

"This data and others like it show us that young people and their families have been under incredible levels of stress during the pandemic," Ethier added. "Our data exposes cracks and uncovers an important layer of insight into the extreme disruptions that some youth have encountered during the pandemic."

The CDC's first nationwide survey to assess high school students' well-being during the pandemic was conducted from January to June 2021.

It found that 55% reported emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, including swearing at, insulting, or putting down the student. About 11% reported [physical abuse](#) by a parent or other adult in the home, including hitting, beating or kicking.

Meanwhile, more than a third (37%) of respondents said they had poor mental health during the pandemic, while 44% were felt persistently sad or hopeless during the past year.

Nearly 20% had seriously considered suicide, while 9% had attempted suicide.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, along with female high school students, were more likely to report poor mental health, [emotional abuse](#) by a parent or caregiver, and having attempted suicide.

The data also show that 36% of students experienced racism before or during the pandemic, with the highest rates seen among Asian students (64%), Black students (55%) and students of multiple races (55%).

Being a target of racism has been linked to poor mental health, poor school performance and lifelong unhealthy behaviors, according to the CDC.

Previous data from the agency showed that mental health was already getting worse among [high school students](#) before the pandemic.

"These data echo a cry for help," CDC Acting Principal Deputy Director Dr. Debra Houry said in an agency news release. "The COVID-19 pandemic has created traumatic stressors that have the potential to further erode students' mental well-being. Our research shows that surrounding youth with the proper support can reverse these trends and help our youth now and in the future."

The survey did find that students who felt connected to adults and fellow students at school were much less likely than those without a sense of being cared for, supported and belonging at school to: feel chronically sad or hopeless (35% vs. 53%); seriously consider attempting suicide

(14% vs. 26%), or to attempt suicide (6% vs. 12%).

But only 47% of the teens in the survey said they felt close to people at school during the pandemic.

"Our data also speak powerfully to the importance of schools in mitigating the impact of the pandemic," Ethier said. "We've long known that youth who feel more connected in their schools—that is, they feel safe that their peers and adults in school care about them—have more positive health and well-being.

"Decades of research have demonstrated that youth who feel connected at school are less likely to experience negative health outcomes related to mental health, substance use, violence and sexual risk, and that this protection that connectedness offers can last into adulthood," Ethier said.

The CDC survey data will be published April 1 as part of a [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) special supplement.

"The nation's youth were experiencing a growing [mental health](#) crisis before COVID 19, and it's worsened during the [pandemic](#)," added Dr. Jonathan Mermin, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention.

"Because schools play an important protective role in [young people's](#) lives, we need to do all we can to support educational institutions and their effective policies," he said at the briefing. "The findings we presented today highlight complex issues, however, and kids, parents and schools cannot address them alone."

More information: For more on support for teens and young adults during the pandemic, see the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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