

Pandemic-era demand for ADHD meds is fueling shortages today

January 11 2024, by Robin Foster



A spike in the use of ADHD medications during the pandemic likely prompted drug shortages that continue to frustrate patients and doctors today, a new study shows.

New prescriptions for stimulants that treat the condition jumped for [young adults](#) and women in particular after the pandemic first struck in March 2020, according to a study published Jan. 10 in the journal [JAMA Psychiatry](#).

Meanwhile, prescriptions also soared for non-stimulant ADHD treatments for adults of all ages, found researchers led by Grace Chai. She's at the Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research.

Why the surge? The mental and emotional strain of the pandemic, coupled with an increased use of telemedicine that made it easier for patients to get help, were big contributors, experts said.

Las Vegas psychiatrist Dr. Ann Childress told the *Associated Press* that more adults started coming to her for help after COVID-19 started sweeping across the country and lockdowns were put in place.

Working from home made it clear to some people how easily they get distracted: Childress says she diagnosed a lot of parents, especially moms, who saw it in their children and recognized it in themselves.

On top of that, [social media](#) has made people more aware of adult ADHD.

"People are more open to talking about [mental health issues](#) now," said Childress, who was not involved in the study.

Rising use of ADHD treatments, along with manufacturing problems, triggered an [Adderall shortage](#) that first began in October 2022. Unfortunately, supply problems for several treatments still haven't eased.

"Each week, there are about 10 things that are in shortage," Childress

said.

Federal regulators do limit the production of some ADHD stimulant treatments because they are controlled substances, even as they try to gauge future demand for the drugs.

But Mike Ganio, who studies drug shortages at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), noted that predicting demand is tricky at best, and unexpected spikes in use can prompt shortages.

"It's a business. Nobody wants to produce more, or hold on their shelves more, inventory than will be needed," he explained.

Overall, the ASHP counted over [300 drug shortages](#) in the United States last fall. Aside from ADHD drugs, [shortages of cancer treatments](#) have also persisted.

More information: Visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for more on [drug shortages](#).

Grace Chai et al, Trends in Incident Prescriptions for Behavioral Health Medications in the US, 2018-2022, *JAMA Psychiatry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2023.5045](#)

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