Sweden orders review after 'explosion' of ADHD cases

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Sweden is seeing "an explosion" of ADHD cases among children that has put it far above the global average, the government said Friday as it ordered a review to find out why.

Around 10.5 percent of boys and six percent of girls in Sweden in 2022 had been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Social Affairs Minister Jakob Forssmed told reporters, citing statistics from the Board of Health and Welfare.

The figures were expected to rise to 15 and 11 percent respectively before leveling off, he said, citing a forecast from the Swedish Medical Products Agency.

Around five to seven percent of children worldwide have an ADHD diagnosis, the government said.

"Sweden stands out in this context. The number of ADHD diagnoses has increased sharply over time... and shows no sign of abating," Forssmed said.

In addition, ADHD medications prescribed to boys aged 10 to 17 had increased by 800 percent over the past 15 years, from one percent of boys having a prescription in 2001 to eight percent in 2022.

For girls the increase was tenfold, from 0.5 percent to around five percent.
Forssmed ordered the Medical Products Agency and other concerned authorities to conduct a review to find out what was behind the surge.

"More knowledge is needed," he said.

Since Sweden's previous treatment recommendation was issued in 2016, "new medications have been developed, as well as new research and expanded indicators", he said.

Forssmed said some of the explanations that have been floated include "increased awareness among healthcare professionals, schools and the public (and) broader diagnosis criteria".

"There also seems to be a belief that a diagnosis has been a formal or informal prerequisite to be able to get extra help in school."

He said the review was part of the government's plan to promote mental health and prevent suicide among children and youths.

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