

Pediatric speech disorder diagnoses more than doubled amid COVID-19 pandemic

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Recent data revealed a 110% increase in speech disorder diagnoses for children aged 0 to 12 years in 2022, compared to the pre-pandemic era.

Pediatric speech disorders for children aged 0 to 12 years more than doubled amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with infants aged 0 to 2 years most affected, according to a research brief from Komodo Health.

The analysis from Komodo's Healthcare Map primarily compared new diagnosis rates of speech disorders for the population in the pre-and post-COVID-19 pandemic timeframe. January 1, 2018, through December, 2019, is defined as the pre-pandemic era, while January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2022, is defined as the post-pandemic era in this analysis.



Child speaking with adult | Image Credit: © Dragana Gordic - © Dragana Gordic - stock.adobe.com.

According to the brief, speech disturbances and delays were defined using International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision Procedure Coding System (ICD-10-DM) codes for speech and language developmental disorders. Evaluations for speech disorders were defined using Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS), Current Procedural Terminology (CPT), and ICD-10-PCS codes for speech and language pathology, and motor speech assessment codes, among others.



Compared to the pre-pandemic era, a 110% increase in speech disorders occurred for children aged 0 to 12 years in 2022. In the pre-pandemic era, an average of 570,000 children per year were diagnosed with a speech disorder, compared to the roughly 1.2 million children that were diagnosed with a speech disorder in 2022. Annual diagnoses increased 29% in 2021 and an additional 81% in 2022, respectively, compared to the pre-pandemic average.

Infants and children aged 0 to 2 saw the largest spike in speech disorder diagnoses, with a 136% increase in 2022 compared to the pre-pandemic era. Children aged 3 to 5 years were the largest portion of patients with new speech disorder diagnoses prior to and after the onset of the pandemic. Still, this age group saw a 107% increase in diagnoses in 2022 alone.

There was a 93% increase in new speech disorder diagnoses for children aged 6 to 12 in 2022, compared to the pre-pandemic era. Data suggests adolescents and teenagers aged 13 to 17 years were widely unaffected during the pre- and post-pandemic eras.

According to the analysis, for children aged 0 to 12 years, there were approximately 9 newly diagnosed children for every 100 speech assessments administered. Approximately 21 patients out of every 100 assessments were newly diagnosed with a speech disorder in 2022, a roughly 115% increase.

Reduced socialization and school disruptions, among other pandemic-related factors, likely impacted the speech development of children throughout the pandemic. Research to understand how pandemic-related aspects impacted the rapid diagnoses in pediatric speech disorders is still ongoing.

The substantial increases in diagnoses in 2021 and 2022 could reflect lower healthcare utilization for non-emergencies during 2020, a year that saw a temporary decline in speech disorder diagnoses.

Reference

Komodo Health. Louder than words: Pediatric speech disorders skyrocket throughout pandemic. Khan T, Freeman R, Druet A. March 14, 2023. Accessed March 23, 2023. https://www.komodohealth.com/hubfs/2023/Speech_Pathology_Research_Brief.pdf?hsCtaTracking=e40f8354-b93c-4306-9160-2bcce2f146de%7Cf835bb14-ede9-434f-a4c0-c55564520191

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