

# Youth Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development  
Teen Brains. Today's Science. Brighter Future.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on people around the world. The ABCD Study®, the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States, collected information about adolescent experiences before and during the pandemic. Using these data, researchers have studied the many ways the pandemic affected adolescents in the U.S. These studies look at how youth activities and mental health changed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

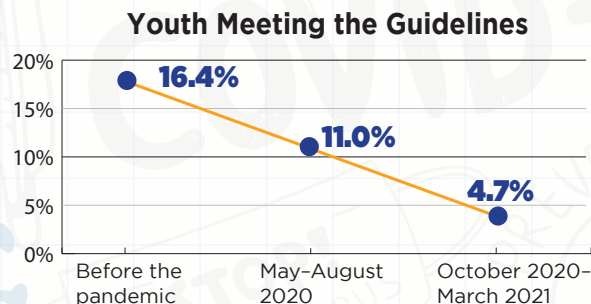


## How Did Physical Activity Change During the Pandemic?

### Decrease in physical activity

Fewer youth met the 2018 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services weekly physical activity guidelines during the pandemic.

[cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/guidelines)



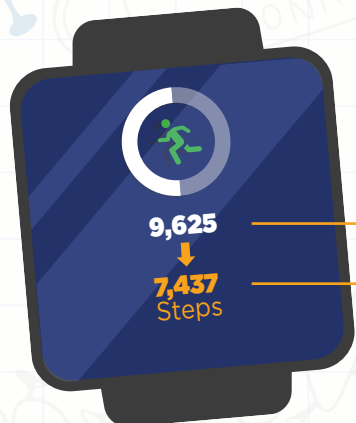
There were differences in who met physical activity guidelines. Youth were **more likely** to meet the guidelines when they had:

- ▶ More social support
- ▶ Better coping behaviors

Youth were **less likely** to meet the guidelines when they had:

- ▶ Poorer mental health
- ▶ More stress
- ▶ More COVID-19-related worry

Surveys identified that youth reported doing more physical activity per week than parents/caregivers reported them doing, especially for youth who were more active than the average.



## Mental Health

Girls were more likely than boys to have stress and be depressed



### Youth were more likely to be sad or depressed if:

#### Before the pandemic, they had

- ▶ Poor mental health symptoms.
- ▶ More negative childhood experiences (such as experiencing or witnessing violence or abuse, or living in unsafe or unstable environments).

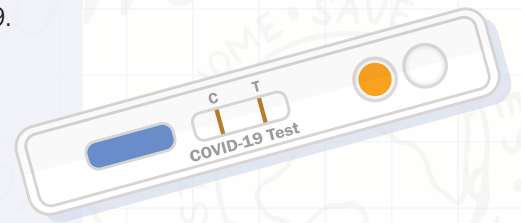
#### During the pandemic,

- ▶ There were more COVID-19 cases in the community.
- ▶ They were from a family that lost wages/income because of COVID-19.
- ▶ They had food insecurity, disruption to medical care or mental health treatments, or lived in economically deprived neighborhoods.
- ▶ They experienced COVID-19-related racial discrimination.



### Vaccination reduced youth worries.

After COVID-19 vaccines for adults were released, there was a decrease in youth stress, sadness, and COVID-19-related worries.



### More screen use was associated with worse mental health and perceived stress.

Predictors of worse anxiety and depression included youth spending more time:

- ▶ Watching COVID-19 news
- ▶ Playing single-player games
- ▶ Browsing the internet



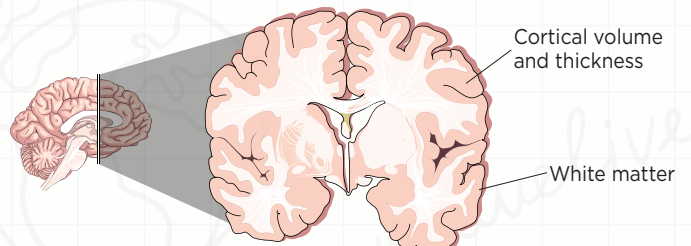
### Higher stress levels were associated with:

- ▶ **Sleep problems**, like troubles falling asleep or staying asleep.
- ▶ **Going through puberty.**



### Lower stress levels were associated with:

- ▶ **Larger cortical volume and thickness** in MRI scans of the brain.



## Staying Positive During the Pandemic

### What's different in youth who have a positive attitude?

- Participating in more outdoor activities
- Doing more family activities
- Having more parental or caregiver monitoring
- Having better social support



### Useful coping strategies:



Coping strategies helped youth during the pandemic and can also continue to be used now to reduce stress.

Youth with more coping strategies:

- ▶ Were more physically active
- ▶ Spent less time in front of screens
- ▶ Had a more positive perception of family well-being



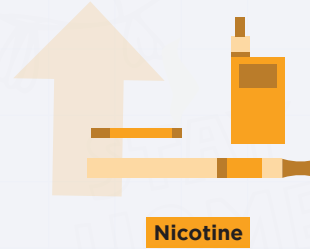
### Remote learning and attitudes toward school:

- ▶ From October 2020 through February 2021, students who went to school **in person** felt more positively about school and spent more time in school activities than those in remote learning.
- ▶ Students who had **remote learning** had more caregiver involvement with their schooling.
- ▶ The more caregiver involvement remote learners had, the **more positive** they were about school.



## How Did Substance Use Change During the Pandemic?

- ▶ Alcohol use **decreased** among 12-year-olds: **2.2% → 1.2%**
- ▶ Nicotine/tobacco use **increased** among 11-year-olds: **0% → 1.8%**
- ▶ Prescription drug use **increased** among 11-year-olds: **0% → 0.9%**



### Several factors related to the increase of substance use:



COVID-19 uncertainty



General stress



Anxiety



Depression

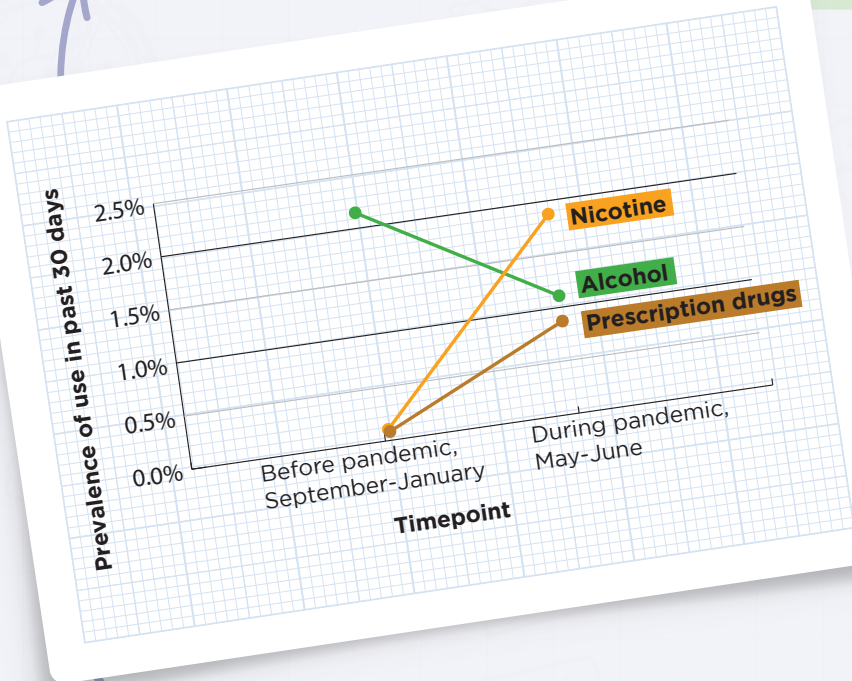
- ▶ Youth who perceived that they were monitored less by caregivers were more likely to use a substance.
- ▶ Caregivers' use of alcohol, nicotine, or cannabis increased the likelihood of youth using any substance.



Youth reported worse family relationships the more days caregivers used alcohol in the past month.



These numbers are low. Only 8% of youth reported ANY use of substances (alcohol, nicotine, or prescription drugs) during the pandemic.





These studies show youth experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They don't show if or how one thing causes another and if these relationships differ between different groups of people. These studies included data from participants when they were 9 to 14 years old. Many things could affect these findings, which may also change over time. More research is needed to know for sure.

## This information is made possible by the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development<sup>SM</sup> Study.

Teens participating in this study help scientists answer important questions that improve their understanding about youth experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. These and other ABCD-supported studies let us learn more about how the brain develops, improving the health and well-being of children now and for future generations.

Learn more: [abcdstudy.org/families](https://abcdstudy.org/families)

## COVID-19 News Articles

### How to Reduce the Screen Time Your Children Built Up Over the COVID-19 Pandemic

[www.healthline.com/health-news/how-to-reduce-the-screen-time-your-children-built-up-over-the-covid-19-pandemic](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-to-reduce-the-screen-time-your-children-built-up-over-the-covid-19-pandemic)

### Study reveals stable usage of drugs by adolescents in the first six months of the pandemic

[www.news-medical.net/news/20210825/Study-reveals-stable-usage-of-drugs-by-adolescents-in-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic.aspx](https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210825/Study-reveals-stable-usage-of-drugs-by-adolescents-in-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic.aspx)

### What are the associations of COVID-19 policy related economic and schooling disruptions with mental health and sleep in US children?

[www.news-medical.net/news/20230317/What-are-the-associations-of-COVID-19-policy-related-economic-and-schooling-disruptions-with-mental-health-and-sleep-in-US-children.aspx](https://www.news-medical.net/news/20230317/What-are-the-associations-of-COVID-19-policy-related-economic-and-schooling-disruptions-with-mental-health-and-sleep-in-US-children.aspx)

### COVID-19-Related Financial Disruptions Linked to Child Mental Health

[www.consumer.healthday.com/covid-19-related-financial-disruptions-linked-to-child-mental-health-2659593393.html](https://www.consumer.healthday.com/covid-19-related-financial-disruptions-linked-to-child-mental-health-2659593393.html)

### Children's Mental Health Impacted by Adult COVID-19 Vaccination Rates

[www.consumer.healthday.com/children-s-mental-health-impacted-by-adult-covid-19-vaccination-rates-2657235357.html](https://www.consumer.healthday.com/children-s-mental-health-impacted-by-adult-covid-19-vaccination-rates-2657235357.html)

### How the COVID-19 pandemic and machine learning delivered insights into adolescent mental health

[www.medium.com/dish/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-machine-learning-delivered-insights-into-adolescent-mental-health-bfe0e4941dee](https://www.medium.com/dish/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-machine-learning-delivered-insights-into-adolescent-mental-health-bfe0e4941dee)

### Parents in disadvantaged communities talk to their kids more about COVID-19 related risks, study finds

[www.news-medical.net/news/20220216/Parents-in-disadvantaged-communities-talk-to-their-kids-more-about-COVID-19-related-risks-study-finds.aspx](https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220216/Parents-in-disadvantaged-communities-talk-to-their-kids-more-about-COVID-19-related-risks-study-finds.aspx)

### Supportive relationships, healthy behaviors may have a positive effect on adolescents' mental health during the pandemic

[www.news-medical.net/news/20220124/Supportive-relationships-healthy-behaviors-may-have-a-positive-effect-on-adolescents-mental-health-during-the-pandemic.aspx](https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220124/Supportive-relationships-healthy-behaviors-may-have-a-positive-effect-on-adolescents-mental-health-during-the-pandemic.aspx)

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