Hospital Use Among California Children

Number of Hospital Discharges Among Children Ages 0-17

Definition: Number of hospital discharges among children ages 0-17, excluding newborns (e.g., in 2020, there were 171,769 hospitalizations among California children).

Data Source: California Dept. of Health Care Access and Information custom tabulation (Feb. 2021).

What It Is

Kidsdata.org provides the following measures of hospital use among children ages 0-17:

- **Emergency department (ED) visits**, in which a patient is treated and released without being admitted to the hospital. The number of ED visits overall, the number and percentage of visits for the most common primary diagnoses, and the number and percentage of visits by expected source of payment are available for the state, counties, and county groups.

- **Hospital discharges**, which reflect stays that generally involve a longer course of treatment for which a patient is admitted to the hospital. As with ED visits, data are presented for hospital discharges overall, the most common primary diagnoses for hospital stays, and expected sources of payment for hospitalization expenses.

Why This Topic Is Important

All children should have high-quality, accessible, affordable health care, including hospital care when needed. Children with special health care needs, in particular, may require more frequent hospital visits and specialized, intensive medical services. Ensuring that all children have consistent access to affordable, evidence-based, well coordinated, comprehensive, and family-centered care—all within the context of a medical home—can maximize positive outcomes. This type of care also may reduce costly hospitalizations and emergency department visits.

While emergency departments (EDs) are critical sources of acute care for children, frequent or non-urgent ED visits may be an indication of unmet health needs or difficulty accessing appropriate pediatric care. Children from vulnerable groups, especially young children ages 0-5 and those from low-income households, tend to have disproportionately high rates of ED use.

Data on hospital use can illuminate trends in health and health care needs, and can inform disease surveillance and public health prevention efforts. For example, data show that ED visits for psychiatric issues have been rising among young people nationwide, with teens and youth of color experiencing the largest increases. Additionally, mental illness has become the most common cause of...
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