

# Mental Health Diagnoses Among Children with Medical Complexity During the COVID-19 Pandemic



PRESENTER:

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**BACKGROUND:** Little is known about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children with medical complexity.

**OBJECTIVE:** Compare the prevalence of common mental health diagnoses before and during the COVID-19 pandemic within the context of the child's medical complexity.

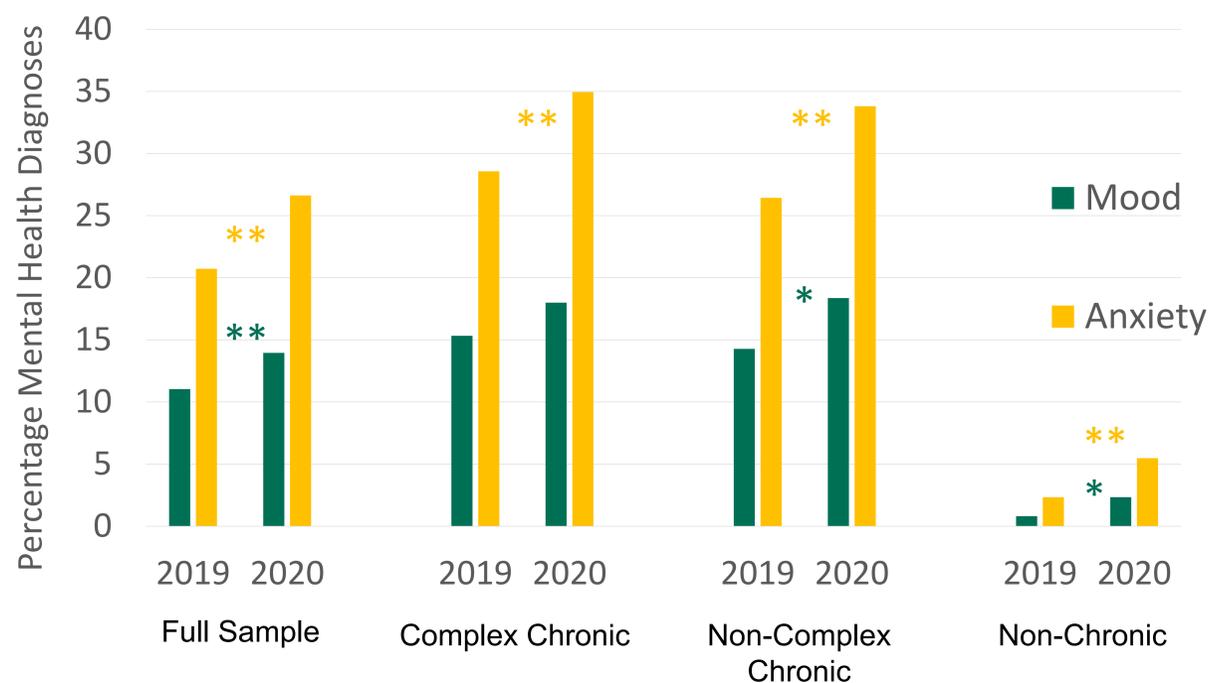
## METHODS

- Retrospective Cohort Study of 3,688 children 6-17 years receiving specialty care for physical illness, 2019 & 2020
- Vermont all-payer claims statewide database
- Compared prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders before (2019) and during (2020) COVID-19
- Chi-Squared tests ( $p < 0.05$ )
- Stratified by Pediatric Medical Complexity Algorithm <sup>1</sup>

## RESULTS

- Mood diagnoses were higher in 2020 (14%) than 2019 (11%;  $p < .0001$ ).
- Anxiety diagnoses were higher in 2020 (27%) than 2019 (21%;  $p < .0001$ ).
- Among 1,239 children with **complex chronic disease**, anxiety diagnoses were 4% higher ( $p = .001$ ) in 2020 compared to 2019.
- Among 1,464 children with **non-complex chronic disease**, mood and anxiety diagnoses were 4% ( $p = .003$ ) and 7% ( $p < .0001$ ) higher, respectively, by 2020.
- Among 985 **non-chronic** children, the prevalence of mood or anxiety diagnoses were low (<6%), yet there was a 3% increase ( $p < .0001$ ) in anxiety diagnoses by 2020.

**Mood and Anxiety Diagnoses Among Children with Medical Complexity were Higher During COVID-19 than Before.**



Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

**FIGURE 1:** The proportion of children with mood or anxiety diagnoses in 2019 and 2020, for the full sample, and within subgroups of medical complexity (complex chronic, non-complex chronic, and non-chronic).

## CONCLUSIONS

- During the first year of the pandemic, children receiving specialty care for physical illness exhibited significantly higher prevalence of common mental health diagnoses than before the pandemic.
- The higher and increasing prevalence among children with chronic illness suggests a need for greater attention and specialty clinic resources to support the mental well-being of children with medical complexity.

## NEXT STEPS

- Future studies will examine additional mental disorders of concern and follow children with medical complexity throughout the continuing pandemic into 2021 and 2022.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Simon TD, Haaland W, Hawley K, et al. Development and Validation of the pediatric medical complexity Algorithm (PMCA) version 3.0. *Academic Pediatrics* 2018;18:577e80.

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