



Wake County Public Health Mental Health Issue Brief: Youth (5-18 years)

OVERVIEW

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Experiences like poverty, abuse, or violence can heighten the risk of mental health issues in youth.

Safeguarding youth from such adversities, fostering social and emotional skills, prioritizing psychological well-being, and providing access to mental health support are essential for their current and future well-being.¹

Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among youth.¹



According to the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS),⁶ in North Carolina:

High School Students

39%

reported feeling sad or hopeless, down from 43% in 2021.

Middle School Students

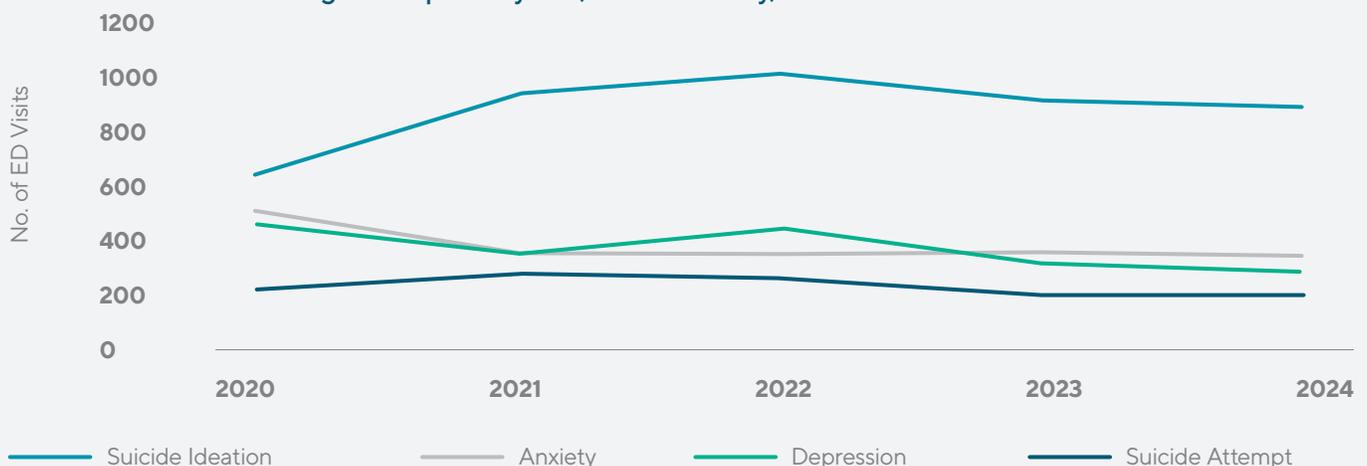
32%

reported feeling sad or hopeless, down from 35% in 2021.

Another metric showing improvement is the percent of high school students seriously considering suicide, which decreased from 22% in 2021 to 18% in 2023.

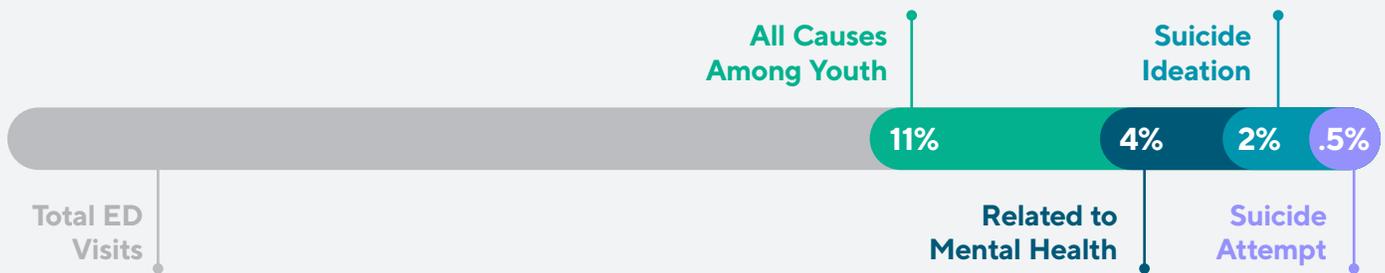
EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS

Figure 1: Number of Emergency Department Visits, Age Group 5-18 years, Wake County, 2020-2024



Emergency Department visits for anxiety among youth aged 5-18 decreased from 2020 to 2021 and remained stable from 2021 to 2024. ED visits for suicide ideation increased in 2021, peaked in 2022, and have been declining since. Visits for suicide attempt peaked in 2021 before starting to decrease. Similarly, ED visits for depression peaked in 2022 and have been steadily declining since then (Figure 1).^{2,3,4,5}

On average, between 2020 and 2024, youth ages 5-18 made up 11% of all Wake County Emergency Department visits. Four percent of ED visits were related to youth mental health. Suicide attempt represented the lowest percentage (0.5%) among mental health indicators, while suicide ideation accounted for the highest percentage (2.0%).



Note: Wake County experienced population growth from 2020-2024 which may have impacted emergency department visits.

EMERGING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH THREATS

The Impact of Social Media on Youth Mental Health: Risks and Solutions⁷

Social media plays a significant role in the lives of adolescents. While social media offers opportunities for social connection and access to mental health information, spending an excessive amount of time on these platforms can be harmful to one's mental health.

Spending an excessive amount of time on these platforms, often exceeding three hours daily, is strongly associated with increased risks of mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, body image issues, and sleep disturbances.

46% of teens age 13-17 who average 3.5 hours/day on social media report that social media makes them feel worse about their body image.

Children and adolescents who spend more than 3 hours a day on social media face double the risk of mental health problems including experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety.⁷ For children, parents and caregivers, technology companies, policy makers, and researchers, there are actions that can be taken to address this youth mental health threat. A collaborative approach involving all is crucial to the encouragement of healthy and responsible social media usage. For more information on the role you can take, visit

[Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS⁸

The mental well-being of youth is influenced by protective and risk factors. Youth with mental health disorders may face challenges in various aspects of life, but for most, distress is usually episodic.

With support from treatment, peers, professionals and a strong social network, youth can effectively navigate challenges associated with mental health disorders.⁸

 RISK FACTORS	 DOMAINS	 PROTECTIVE FACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty and hormonal changes can lead to emotional instability and vulnerability to mental health issues. • Poor social skills and low self-esteem. 	 <p>INDIVIDUAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic success, emotional regulation and strong self esteem. • Involvement in areas such as school, peer groups, sports, work, religion or cultural activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major life changes like moving, divorce, loss of a loved one or academic pressure. • Unhealthy family environments, conflict or dysfunctional relationships. • Challenges related to identity, cultural differences or discrimination. 	 <p>FAMILY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family provides structure, limits, rules, monitoring and predictability. • Supportive relationships with family members. • Clear expectations for behavior and values.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to trauma or substance use including alcohol, drugs, violence or neglect. • Socioeconomic status, access to mental health services, stigma or lack of understanding from family and peers can hinder seeking help. • Bullying, discrimination or social isolation. • Excessive use of social media and exposure to cyberbullying. 	 <p>SCHOOL</p>  <p>NEIGHBORHOOD</p>  <p>COMMUNITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of mentors and support for development of skills and interests. • Opportunities for engagement within school and community. • Positive norms. • Clear expectations for behavior. • Physical and psychological safety.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

-  Call or text 988 (24/7)
-  988lifeline.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

-  Helpline 800-451-9682; Text 919-999-6527
-  Email helpline@naminc.org
-  (Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.)
-  naminc.org

Hopeline

-  Call or text 919-231-4525 or 877-235-4525
-  hopeline-nc.org

Alliance Health Behavioral Health Crisis Line

-  877-223-4617 (24/7)

Mobile Crisis Management (MCM) by Therapeutic Alternatives

-  877-626-1772
-  mytahome.com/mobile-crisis

Find a mental health provider at:

-  findtreatment.samhsa.gov

School Based Mental Health Services

-  Mental health services vary across schools and students may access services in-person or through telehealth.⁹ Alliance Health’s school-based mental health team collaborates with the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) to identify and link eligible WCPSS students with behavioral health services.

REFERENCES

- ¹World Health Organization (WHO), Mental health of adolescents (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>)
- ²North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NCDETECT), Suicide Attempt V2, 2020-2024
- ³North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NCDETECT), Suicide Ideation (ICD-9/10-CM), 2020-2024
- ⁴North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NCDETECT), Anxiety v2 (ICD-10-CM), 2020-2024
- ⁵North Carolina Disease Event Tracking and Epidemiologic Collection Tool (NCDETECT), Depression v2 (ICD-10-CM), 2020-2024
- ⁶Youth Risk Behavior Survey, North Carolina, 2023
- ⁷U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Surgeon General’s Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health (<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/youth-mental-health/social-media/index.html>)
- ⁸Youth.gov, youth mental health, Risk and Protective Factors (<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/risk-and-protective-factors-youth>)
- ⁹Alliance Health School Based Team Annual Report, 2022-2023 School Year