

America's COVID pandemic is now skewing younger

24 September 2020, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Young adults in their 20s now account for more cases of COVID-19 than any other age group, according to a new study from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

From June through August, people in their 20s accounted for more than 20% of all COVID infections in the United States, CDC researchers found.

Unfortunately, these cases have implications for older folks who are more vulnerable to severe and potentially fatal COVID infections, the CDC says.

In the southern United States, increases in the percentage of COVID cases among 20- to 39-year-olds preceded increases among seniors 60 or older by an average of more than eight days.

"Younger individuals, who may not require hospitalization, spread the virus to older, more vulnerable persons," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for

Health Security in Baltimore. "This change in infection patterns underscores the need to fortify vulnerable populations, especially those in nursing homes and assisted living centers, to insulate them from chains of viral transmission."

It's not in the United States alone that COVID cases are trending younger, the CDC added.

A similar age shift occurred in Europe, where the average age of COVID patients dropped from 54 between January and May to 39 in June and July, with people in their 20s representing nearly 20% of cases.

It makes sense that [young adults](#) will be more vulnerable to infection, given how they work and play, said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

"Younger adults also make up a significant percentage of workers in front-line jobs, including retail, [public transit](#), child care and other positions with higher potential for exposure to the public [restaurants, bars, entertainment] where it may be difficult to consistently adhere to social distancing and wearing masks," Glatter said.

Young adults might also feel less inclined to follow social distancing rules and are more drawn to large gatherings, as seen in massive parties at several colleges when students returned to campus. Those parties, of course, presaged COVID outbreaks at a number of universities.

"This includes [peer pressure](#) to socialize and drink alcohol, which makes people more likely to remove their masks, move closer together and speak more loudly—all behaviors that increase spread of the virus," Glatter said.

And while [younger people](#) are less likely to have severe COVID, the virus will make some drastically ill, Adalja added.

"Younger people are not entirely immune from severe disease—especially if they have comorbidities—and some percentage may develop protracted symptoms that interfere with their lives," he said.

In light of such findings, Glatter emphasized how important it is for younger adults to wear masks, adhere to social distancing and practice good hand hygiene.

"These are three behaviors that matter the most for reducing the overall risk to others in the community—but especially to older persons at higher risk for severe COVID-19," Glatter said.

The new study appears in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* for Sept. 23.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [COVID-19](#).

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