2009 to 2018 saw increase in incidence of NAFLD in children

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(HealthDay)—From 2009 to 2018, there was an increase in the incidence of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) among children, although many still remain undiagnosed, according to a study published online Nov. 19 in *Pediatrics*.

Amandeep K. Sahota, M.D., from the Southern California Permanente Medical Group in Pasadena, and colleagues identified patients newly diagnosed with NAFLD using electronic health records for children aged 5 to 18 years. Screening rates and annual incidence rates of NAFLD were calculated from Jan. 1, 2009, to Dec. 31, 2018.

A total of 7,884,844 patient-years were evaluated in the study. The researchers found that screening was performed in 54.0 and 24.0 percent of children with obesity and with overweight, respectively, revealing 36,658 children aged 9 to 18 years with overweight or obesity and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) >30 U/L. Further workup for NAFLD was received by 12.3 percent of these children. Over time, there was a significant increase noted in the diagnosis of NAFLD, from 36.0 to 58.2 per 100,000 in 2009 and 2018, respectively.

"Health care systems and physicians will need to prepare for these growing numbers of children with chronic liver disease," the authors write. "The identification of all children with NAFLD would require improvement in screening practices as well as the evaluation of elevated ALT levels uncovered by screening."

Two authors disclosed financial ties to the pharmaceutical industry.

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