

Medicaid care for transgender children is rare in Florida, data shows

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One week after Florida banned the use of Medicaid to pay for medical treatment of gender dysphoria, newly released data shows the number of transgender children getting such aid remains rare in Florida.

A dozen children diagnosed with [gender](#) dysphoria underwent surgeries over a 12-month period through June 30, according to a report released by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration on Monday.

The report lists only cases covered by Medicaid and omits those paid by [private health insurance](#) or other means. The actual number of children treated is likely higher.

In the same period, 346 children were prescribed [male hormones](#), 151 were administered female hormones and 55 were prescribed puberty blockers, the data shows. Just over 230 children received psychiatric or behavioral health treatment. That's out of Florida's population of about 4 million children age 17 and under, according to the U.S. Census.

Close to half of the children treated at the Youth Gender Program at the University of Florida were on Medicaid, officials there said.

Officials from the DeSantis administration, including Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, began publicly criticizing the treatment of transgender children in April. Since then the state has banned patients from using Medicaid for medical treatment of gender dysphoria and Ladapo has asked the state's Board of Medicine to issue new rules for treating transgender minors.

Michael Haller, chief of pediatric endocrinology at the University of Florida, said the new report shows doctors are providing treatment only to children who need it.

"This directly contradicts the state's suggestion there is a pandemic of children receiving gender affirming care and specifically surgeries," Haller said.

The report does show that the number of children receiving treatment

has increased from past years. Fifteen children were being treated with puberty blockers in 2018, 72 children were prescribed female hormones and 130 were given male hormones. Just over 143 children received psychiatric or behavioral health treatment that same year.

Agency for Health Care Administration spokesman Brock Juarez described the 159% increase of surgeries, puberty blockers and hormones from 2018 as soaring and questioned why this type of treatment had risen more than psychiatric and behavioral treatment, which grew by 61% over the same span.

"This is a concerning statistic and potentially indicative of a medical community increasingly focused on promoting treatments found to be experimental and investigational with the potential for harmful long-term effects, including brain swelling and aneurysm," he said.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration in July identified six cases of brain swelling in females between the ages of 5 and 12 who were taking blockers. It did not ban the drug but added a warning label.

Haller said the drug can lead to increased pressure inside ducts in the brain but said he's seen only one case in 25 years. Puberty blockers have been used for about three decades and are also used to delay puberty in very young children.

The increase in the number of children being prescribed blockers and hormones is likely the result of better access to care, Haller said. Doctors are seeing more children with [gender dysphoria](#) come forward because of increased awareness and acceptance of the condition.

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