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**All Youths with Epilepsy Would Benefit from Mental Health Screening  
*Anxiety, Depression and Suicidal Thoughts Higher Than Expected, Study Shows***

CHICAGO - Children, adolescents and teens with epilepsy may be more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression and have suicidal thoughts than previously believed, according to research being presented virtually at [American Epilepsy Society AES2020](#).

The study found 3 in 10 youths may have anxiety, 4 in 10 may have depression and more than 1 in 10 said they had suicidal thoughts (suicidality). The study is the first to assess screening for suicidality in children, adolescents and teens with epilepsy even when there is no known mental health history, and suggests all youths with epilepsy would benefit from screening for these issues, even if they have no signs.

“Compared to other studies, the percentage of children, adolescents and teens that screened positive for these mental health issues was quite a bit higher than expected,” said Anjali Dagar, M.D., lead author of the study and clinical research fellow at Cleveland Clinic. “Although this is a screening - meaning the diagnosis must be confirmed by a psychiatrist - our findings suggest it is important to screen all youths with epilepsy for underlying psychiatric issues even when there are no signs of concern.”

In the study, researchers screened 119 children, adolescents and teens between the ages of 9-18 years old, excluding those who had been diagnosed with depression, anxiety or suicidality. Using three screening tools, they determined:

- 36 (30.2%) screened positive for anxiety using the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) tool, a 41-item child and parent self-report instrument
- 47 (39.5%) screened positive for depression based on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC), a 20-item self-report tool
- 13 (10.9%) tested positive for suicidality using the Ask Suicide-Screening Questions (ASQ), a four-question instrument for identifying if the person has had thoughts of suicide

Comparatively, a previous study found 19% of youths with epilepsy have anxiety and 13% have depression. Most studies of suicidality in youths with epilepsy have been in children with pre-existing psychiatric diagnoses. In the general youth population overall, about 7% of 2-17-year-olds have anxiety and 3% have depression, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). There are no clear data on suicidality in children and youth without pre-existing depression for the same age range.

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“The suicide tool revealed unrecognized suicidality in more than one of 10 youths with epilepsy, which is significant,” said Tatiana Falcone, M.D., an author of the study and a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Cleveland Clinic Epilepsy Center. “Suicidality is a life-threatening condition that can exist even in the absence of a pre-existing diagnosis of depression or anxiety so it’s important all children, adolescents and teens with epilepsy get screened for all three mental health issues.”

***About the American Epilepsy Society***

*Founded in 1946, the American Epilepsy Society (AES) is a medical and scientific society whose members are dedicated to advancing research and education for preventing, treating and curing epilepsy. AES is an inclusive global forum where professionals from academia, private practice, not-for-profit, government and industry can learn, share and grow to eradicate epilepsy and its consequences.*

*For more information, visit the American Epilepsy Society online at [aesnet.org](http://aesnet.org). Join the AES social conversation today by following @AmEpilepsySoc on Twitter and use the hashtag #AES2020.*

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