



Mott Poll Report

May 17, 2021
Volume 38
Issue 4

Virtual Visits for Kids

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered many aspects of the healthcare system, including the expansion of virtual care, where the patient and provider interact by video. In January 2021, The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents about virtual healthcare visits for their children 0-18 years during the pandemic.

Parents report that two-thirds of their children (68%) had a healthcare visit since March 2020. Among those, most (80%) had an in-person visit only, 12% had both an in-person and a virtual visit, and 8% had a virtual visit only. Children 0-5 years were more likely to have seen a provider in any capacity (78%) than those age 6-12 (64%) or 13-18 (63%).


Among parents whose child had a virtual visit, more than half (57%) say it was either suggested by the provider or was the only option offered; 34% say they chose a virtual visit because of concern about COVID-19 exposure, and 33% say virtual care was more convenient. Parents note that the reason for the virtual visit included check-ups (32%) or minor illnesses (22%), as well as mental health (15%) and follow up visits (15%). Almost all parents who had virtual visits say they were satisfied with the experience (92%) and had all their questions answered during the visit (92%). One-quarter (25%) say their child also needed to be seen in-person for the same issue, while 11% report technical problems with the virtual visit.

For their child's future healthcare, over half of parents (54%) either prefer either virtual visits or have no preference if the child has a minor illness, while 46% prefer in-person visits. For mental health visits, about half (49%) either prefer virtual visits or have no preference, while 51% would prefer an in-person visit. In contrast, most parents prefer in-person visits for check-ups (77%) with only 23% being okay with virtual; similarly, 74% prefer an in-person specialist, with 26% okay with virtual visits.

Parents' major concerns about virtual visits are that the provider would not be as thorough as at an in-person visit (59%) or that their child's problem would not be able to be addressed in a virtual visit (48%). About 1 in 4 parents are concerned about technical problems with virtual visits (25%); this is more common among lower- vs higher-income parents (30% for <\$50,000 income vs 27% for \$50,000-\$100,000 vs 20% for >\$100,000).

Parent preferences for child's doctor visits

Percent of parents indicating preference on type of visit for their child



	Virtual OK	In-person preferred
Minor illness	54%	46%
Mental health	49%	51%
Specialist	26%	74%
Check-up	23%	77%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2021

Report Highlights

1 in 5 parents report their child had a virtual healthcare visit during the pandemic.

Lower-income parents have more concerns about technical problems related to virtual care.

Parents are more comfortable with virtual visits for mental health or minor illness than for check-ups.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in January 2021 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,002). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 5 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the delivery of healthcare for children, both for routine check-ups and visits for illnesses. In some cases, providers limited or did not offer in-person visits due to safety concerns of parents and their children. Instead, many providers either began to offer or expanded their capacity for virtual visits for children. Virtual visits allow the patient and/or a parent to interact by video and are used to remotely deliver health care. Parents in this Mott Poll shared their experiences since March 2020 in getting health care for their children either in-person or via virtual visits.

One in five parents reported their child had a virtual visit in the past year. Although virtual visits have been around for a while, this represents a marked increase in their use for children. One reason for this increase may be a lack of another option; around half of parents in the Poll who reported their child had a virtual visit were not given another choice by their provider.

The impetus to expand virtual visits during the pandemic was to limit exposure to COVID-19 for parents, children, and healthcare providers. For 1 in 3 parents who chose virtual care, safety was the primary reason. However, other parents chose a virtual visit for convenience. For busy parents, a virtual visit reduces the burden of travel time to the appointment and minimizes time away from work or school.

Although having a virtual visit for their child was a new experience for many parents, 9 in 10 were satisfied with the visit and felt all their questions were answered. In some cases, virtual visits lead to an in-person visit if the provider determines they need to physically examine the child. One in four parents needed to have their child seen by the provider in-person after the virtual visit. This could reflect the provider's wish to examine the child, or the need for additional services such as immunizations or lab tests.

For parents who may be hesitant about virtual visits, experts recommend first trying it with a non-urgent issue like a sleep or feeding question. This would allow parents to gauge whether they feel that the provider can understand the child's symptoms or condition, and are comfortable asking questions in the virtual format.

When asked about future visits, most parents in this Mott Poll still would prefer an in-person visit for their child. However, around half would be OK with a virtual visit for a mental health concern or a minor illness. If parents decide to try a virtual visit for a mental health concern, experts recommend making sure it is not at a time when their child would have "zoom fatigue" or late in the day which might make concentration and communication difficult.

Around 1 in 4 parents expressed concern about potential technical problems if they were to try a virtual visit for their child. This concern was more common among lower-income families. Providers need to make sure there are clear directions and technical support available for families who use virtual care. Systems and policies that provide access to both the needed technology and to reliable internet service will be essential to ensure there is not inequity in availability and use of virtual visits. Parents not able to connect through a video visit might start with a telephone consultation. But, they should be prepared to bring their child for an in-person visit if needed.

Although parents may feel most comfortable having a virtual visit with their child's own provider, several pay-as-you-go or commercial services are offering virtual visits around the clock as an added convenience for parents. Sometimes insurers may also recommend a preferred company for afterhours virtual visits. If parents are at all concerned about the advice they are getting from a provider they do not know, they should ask the provider about their qualifications, including their specialty and experience with children.