

# Telehealth Utilization among Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Employer-Sponsored Plans, 2019–2022

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## Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted healthcare services for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- The impact of the pandemic on access to critical therapies for children with ASD, such as early intensive behavioral intervention, remains unclear.

## Objectives

- To assess the monthly in-person and telehealth outpatient visits among children aged 3–17 with ASD between 2019 and 2022.
- To examine how the uptake of behavioral intervention-related services for privately insured children with ASD changes during the pandemic.

## Methods

### Data

- MarketScan® Commercial Database for employer-sponsored (ESI) plans, 2019–2022

### Study population

- Children aged 3–7 years at the beginning of the calendar year
- Continuously enrolled in ESI plans
- Inpatient or outpatient claims for at least one calendar year from 2019 to 2022

### Case definitions

- Children with  $\geq 2$  ASD claims on separate dates within a calendar year

### Identification of telehealth and in-person encounters

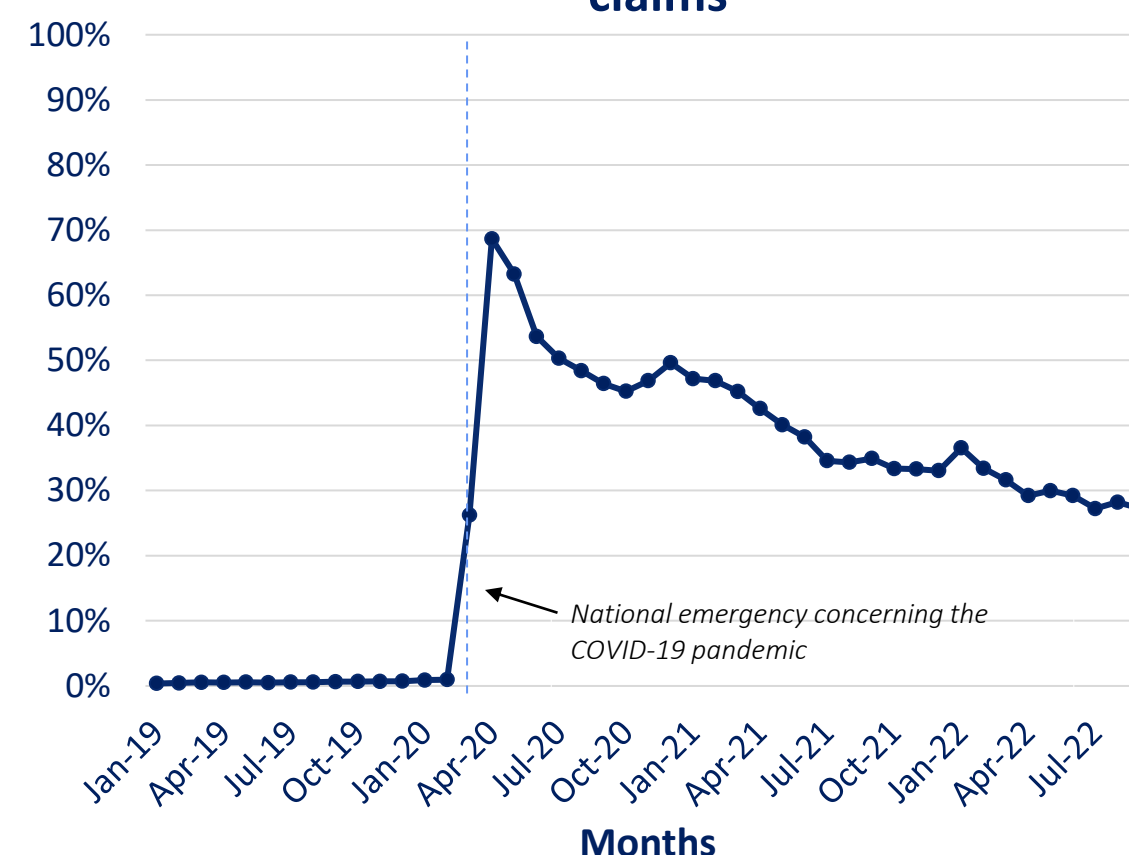
- Telehealth: Place of service, telehealth-related procedure modifiers, and current procedural terminology (CPT) and healthcare common procedure coding system (HCPCS) codes
- All other encounters were classified as in-person

### Analyses

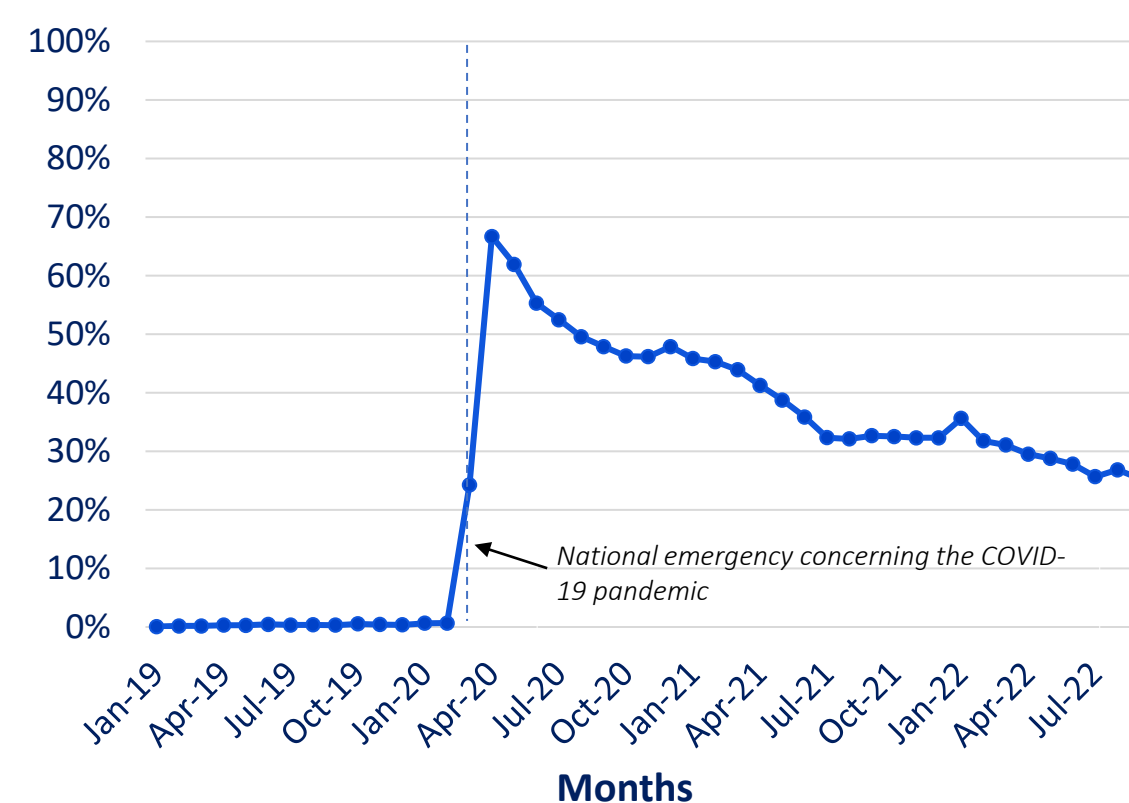
- Repeated cross-sectional analysis
- Estimated monthly percentages of children with ASD who had telehealth and in-person outpatient encounters, both overall and behavioral intervention-related services
- Estimated monthly in-person and telehealth outpatient encounters per child among children with ASD, both overall and behavioral intervention-related services

## Results

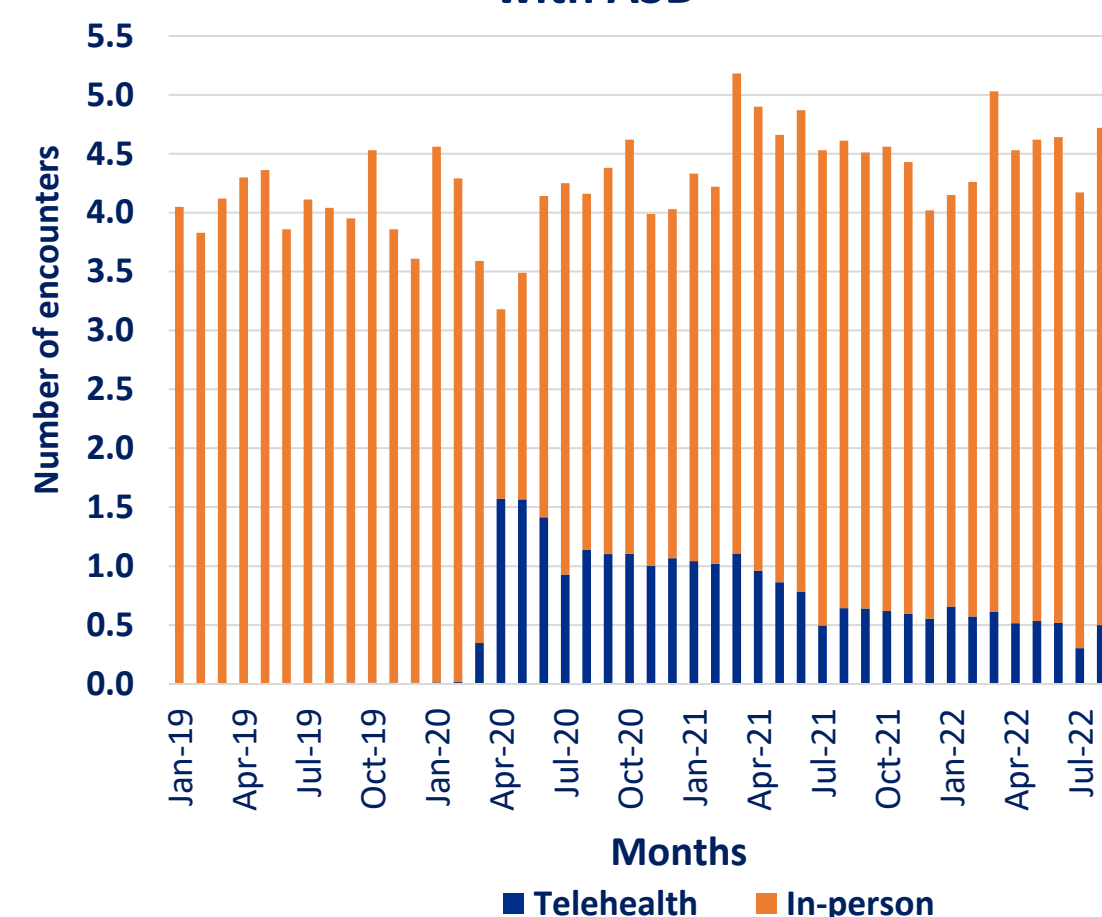
Monthly percentage of children aged 3 to 17 years with ASD who had telehealth visits among those who had outpatient claims



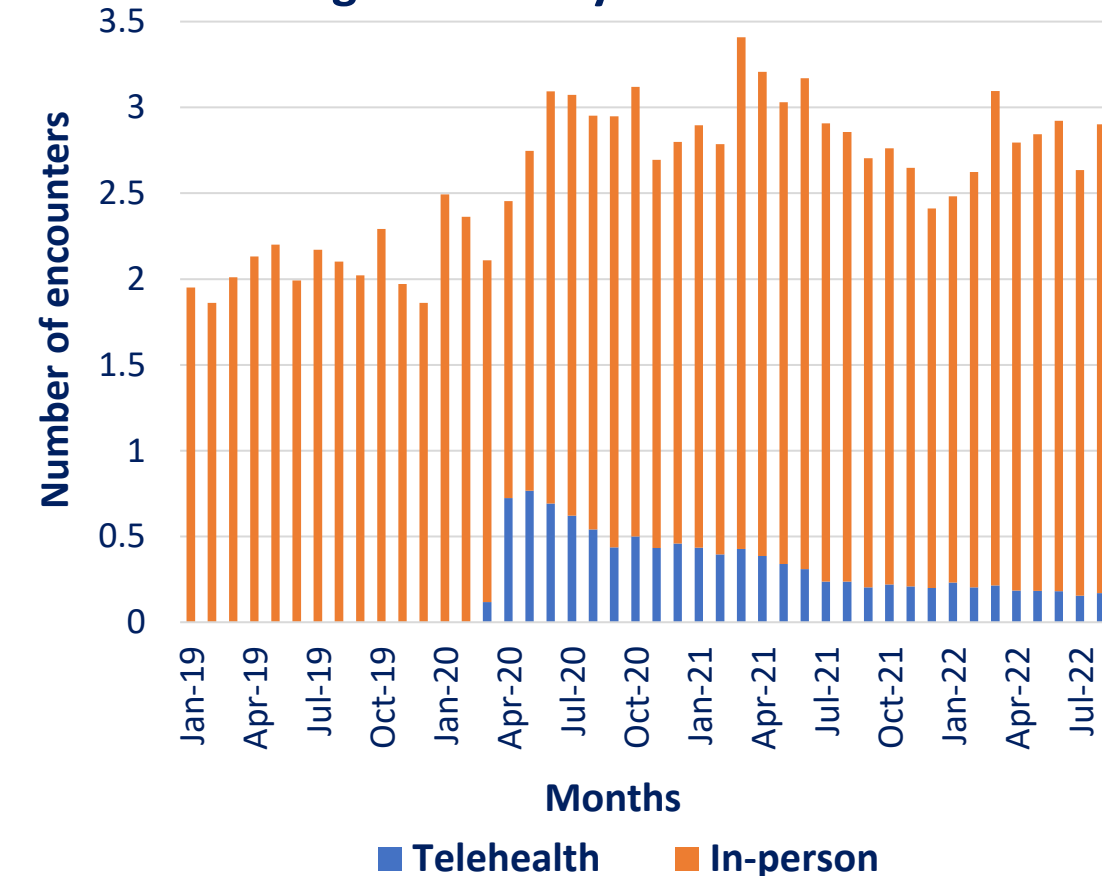
Monthly percentage of children aged 3 to 17 years with ASD who had telehealth visits for behavioral intervention-related services among those who had outpatient behavioral related claims



Monthly number of in-person and telehealth outpatient encounters per child among children aged 3 to 17 years with ASD



Monthly number of in-person and telehealth encounters related to outpatient behavioral intervention-related services per child among children aged 3 to 17 years with ASD



## Key findings

- Telehealth use for privately insured young children with ASD surged in the initial months of the pandemic, both overall and for behavioral intervention-related services.
- Despite a subsequent decrease in telehealth visits after the initial surge, usage remained elevated through 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

## Conclusions

- Telehealth ensured ongoing outpatient care, including behavioral intervention-related services, for children aged 3–17 years enrolled in employer-sponsored plans during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Future studies should assess the effectiveness of telehealth in delivering care for children with ASD, including behavioral intervention-related services.

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### Disclaimer

- The data presented here are provisional and have not been published
- The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CDC

