

Safety Warnings About Antidepressants Linked With Increase in Suicide Attempts



After health officials warned antidepressant use could lead to an increased risk of suicidal thoughts among young people, there was a rise in suicide attempts in this age group, according to a new study.

Doctors may have avoided prescribing antidepressants after media reports of the warnings by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), *Reuters* reports.

This could have led to an increase in depressed children and teens who were untreated, the researchers report in *BMJ*.

"This study is a one of the first to directly measure a health outcome driven by the interaction of public policy and mass media," lead author Christine Lu of Harvard Medical School said in a news release. "The FDA, the media and physicians need to find better ways to work together to ensure that patients get the medication that they need, while still being protected from potential risks."

In 2004, the FDA required warnings about the link between antidepressants and an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in children and teens to be printed on antidepressant drug labels. The warnings were expanded in 2007 to include young adults. Previous research indicated use of antidepressants decreased after the warnings were issued, but other treatments for depression, such as therapy, did not increase.

The new study looked at data from healthcare organizations that provide care to about 10 million people. They found after the warnings were issued, use of antidepressants fell 31 percent among teens, 24 percent among young adults and 15 percent among adults.

During the same period, there was an increase in the number of teens and young adults who received medical care for overdosing on psychiatric medications, which the researchers said indicated an increase in suicide attempts. These overdoses rose by 22 percent among teens and 34 percent among young adults. There was no change among adults, and no change in completed suicides.