Black and Latino Children Less Likely to Get X-Rays in ER

Minority kids are less likely to get X-rays, MRIs and CT scans during emergency hospital visits.

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New findings published in JAMA Network Open by researchers at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago reveal that Black and Latino children aren't being offered diagnostic imaging—such as X-rays, MRIs, ultrasounds and CT scans—at the same rate as white children when admitted to emergency rooms.

For the study, researchers reviewed more than 13 million visits to 44 pediatric emergency departments.

Scientists found that health professionals conducted imaging in over 33% of emergency visits by white patients, compared with 24% for Black patients and 26% for Latino patients. Overall, findings showed that Black and Latino children were less likely to receive imaging of any kind during hospital visits.

Researchers aren't sure whether the findings indicate overuse of imaging in white patients or underuse in Black and Latinx patients, said Elizabeth Alpern, MD, the division head of emergency medicine at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and a coauthor of the inquiry.

Previous studies have shown that doctors overuse imaging in white children compared with nonwhite kids. Alpern stressed that both overuse and underuse of diagnostic imaging are concerning. "Overuse may expose children to unnecessary risks associated with imaging, while underuse may result in misdiagnoses, need for further care and potentially worse clinical outcomes," she explained.

However, new evidence-based guidelines for pediatric imaging are underway, Alpern noted. This could be crucial in helping end racial and ethnic disparities as well as providing equal care for all youngsters.

For related coverage, read "Minority Kids Less Likely to Receive Proper Pain Meds in ER."

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