

New Surgeon General Report Details Harms of Screen Use

The Office of the Surgeon General under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a report warning against the dangers of screen time for children and adolescents.

“Children today spend more time on screens than sleeping, exercising, or engaging face-to-face with family and friends – and we are seeing the consequences in rising rates of anxiety, depression, obesity, and developmental challenges,” said Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. “This Advisory equips parents, schools, and communities with clear, science-based strategies to reclaim healthy habits, reduce harm, and help Make Our Children Healthy Again.”

According to the report, early exposure to screens, specifically among preschool-aged children, was “associated with differences in brain structure, particularly reduced cortical thickness in regions supporting visual processing and higher-order cognitive functions.”



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“Research in preschool-aged children has found that greater screen time is associated with poorer performance on developmental screening measures, including communication,” the report notes.

“Harmful screen use may be associated with attention problems, and higher levels of screen use have been observed among children with autism spectrum disorder, although the causal direction of these relationships remains unclear,” it adds.

Among adolescents, the earlier a child obtained a smartphone, such as between the ages of 12 and 13, were “more likely to show signs of clinically significant mental health problems by age 13 than those who still did not have one.”

The surgeon general’s office also provided a toolkit for families and educators, encouraging families to adopt a “media plan,” and urging schools to implement “bell-to-bell ban policies” for smartphones. For health care providers, the toolkit encourages practitioners to ask questions about a child’s screen use and implore parents whether they have rules about screen use at home.

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