

Coping with COVID-19: How Young People Use Digital Media to Manage Their Mental Health

Fact sheet: Mental health, digital health practices, and social media use among female U.S. teens and young adults (age 14–22)

This fact sheet presents data from a nationally representative survey of more than 1,500 14- to 22-year-olds in the U.S., conducted in September–November 2020 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, on behalf of Common Sense, the California Health Care Foundation, and Hopelab. The complete survey findings, methodology, quotes from participants, and text of the questionnaire are available [here](#).

Many U.S. female youth (age 14–22) face serious health concerns:

- Four in 10 female youth (39%) report symptoms of moderate to severe depression, up from 30% in 2018.
- One in 10 female youth (9%) are at risk of problematic substance use; however, 73% of female youth abstain from alcohol or drugs.

95% of female youth have used digital tools for health purposes, including seeking health information online, using a health-related app, connecting to a provider, or finding others online with similar health concerns.

- 88% of female youth have looked for health information online, and the top topic was COVID-19.
- 77% of female youth have used a health app, and 47% use a period/menstruation tracker.
- 42% of female youth have looked for others with similar health concerns online.
- Female youth are more likely than male youth to use digital tools for mental health, including using mental health apps, such as for depression, meditation, mindfulness, mood tracking, stress reduction, or alcohol or drug use (38% vs. 24%), and searching online for mental health information (71% vs. 49%).
- Female youth are more likely than male youth to have searched for information online about birth control (31% vs. 8%), pregnancy (28% vs. 9%), and eating disorders (27% vs. 9%).

Half of female youth have used telehealth services to connect with providers online.

- 86% of female youth who have connected with a provider online say they found it "very" (35%) or "somewhat" (51%) helpful.
- 51% of female youth who have not yet connected with a provider online are "very" (9%) or "somewhat" (43%) interested in doing so.

The majority of female youth encounter hateful content online.

- Seven in 10 female youth "often" or "sometimes" encounter sexist (68%) and body-shaming (74%) content.
- More female teens (age 14–17) encounter sexist content "often" in 2020 than those who did in 2018 (24% vs. 14%).

However, many female youth have positive opinions about social media, especially during the era of COVID-19:

- During the coronavirus pandemic, the majority of female youth say social media has been "very" or "somewhat" important for staying connected to friends and family (88%), keeping informed about current events (78%), and helping learn how to protect themselves and others from the virus (73%).
- Most female youth say social media is "very" or "somewhat" important to get inspiration from others (74%), express themselves creatively (66%), feel less alone (59%), and get support or advice (52%).
- 42% of female youth say social media helps them feel better when they are depressed, stressed, or anxious (39% say it makes no difference, and 19% say it makes them feel worse). This is significantly more positive than female youth in 2018, when 28% said it helped them feel better.
- For female teens (age 14–17), the percentage who say social media makes them "less lonely" has doubled from 25% in 2018 to 50% during the pandemic.

Suggested citation: Rideout, V., Fox, S., Peebles, A., & Robb, M. (2021). *Fact sheet: Mental health, digital health practices, and social media use among female U.S. teens and young adults*. Common Sense and Hopelab.

ISSN 2767-0163