

HEALTH REPORT - Spending Up for Behavior-Related Drugs for Children*By Jerilyn Watson*

Broadcast: May 26, 2004

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

More and more children take medicines to treat depression and other problems such as aggressiveness and lack of self-control. In fact, a new study says Americans spent more on behavior-related drugs for children last year than on antibiotics or asthma medicines. The research shows that spending increased seventy-seven percent between two-thousand and two-thousand-three.

One reason was increased use. The report says the number of children on behavioral drugs increased more than twenty percent. But these medicines also cost more than traditional drugs for problems like infections. And patients usually stay on behavioral medicines longer.

The report is by a company that administers drug plans for health care providers around the country. Medco Health Solutions studied the records of three-hundred-thousand young people up to age nineteen. It found that among children who take at least one medicine from their doctor, nearly nine percent are on a behavior-related drug. Medco says five percent of all children in the United States take behavioral medicine.

Some of the largest increases involve medicines to treat attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder. The study says spending for such drugs last year increased three-hundred-sixty-nine percent for children under age five. Companies have been developing new treatments for children who have difficulty learning and staying calm.

Also, Medco says spending for anti-depressants for children grew twenty-five percent between two-thousand and last year. Use of these drugs increased by twenty-seven percent.

Some parents say anti-depressants and other behavioral drugs have improved their children's lives. But others worry that too many young people are being given such medicines and that some drugs could be harmful.

In March, the United States Food and Drug Administration asked makers of anti-depressants to include a warning statement. The agency says health care providers should carefully observe adults and children who take these drugs.

Scientists are investigating the possibility that some patients might become more depressed and try to kill themselves. This might be especially true at the beginning of treatment or when the amount of medicine is increased or decreased.

This VOA Special English Health Report was written by Jerilyn Watson.

[Email this article to a friend](#)[Printer Friendly Version](#)