

# Black, Latino and Asian Children Are Less Likely to Have Surgery

Minority children are about half as likely to have had surgery in the past year compared with white children.

December 1, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

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Black, Latino and Asian children have a significantly lower number of surgeries performed compared with white children in the United States, according to a recent study by UT Southwestern.

Published in the [Journal of Pediatric Surgery](#), the study analyzed surgery data from the 1999 to 2018 National Health Interview Surveys for over 200,000 children, adjusting for factors such as poverty, insurance status and citizenship.

“We found that Black, Latino and Asian children were roughly half as likely as white children to have had surgery in the prior 12 months,” said Ethan Sanford, MD, first author of the paper and assistant professor of anesthesiology and pain management at UT Southwestern, in a [news release](#). “For children who had surgery, we also found differences in the types of surgery obtained, notably that Latino children were more likely to require urgent or emergent surgery.”

While the study did not pinpoint the cause of this [discrepancy](#), researchers said the difference in surgeries performed could be due to barriers to care many children of color face, including lack of transportation, parents or guardians with rigid work schedules and poor communication from [health care providers](#), which could include language barriers.

“These data raise the concern that minority children are less likely to receive indicated surgery at the most opportune time,” Sanford said. “Additionally, if surgery is omitted or delayed, minority children may have worsening disease that then requires more emergent care, which carries more risk.”

This research adds to existing evidence of racial and ethnic disparities among children within the U.S. health care system. Sanford and his colleagues hope the results of the study will help to “reduce disparities in surgical access for minority children by raising awareness among clinicians, increasing monitoring so that any disparities can be identified expeditiously, stimulating rapid-cycle quality improvement when disparities are identified and prompting further research.”

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