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The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Emerging Adults with Type 1 Diabetes

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The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Emerging Adults with Type 1 Diabetes

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Abstract:

In March 2020, COVID-19 began spreading across the US. People with underlying health conditions, like type 1 diabetes (T1D), were at elevated risk for a severe COVID-19 infection. Recommended mitigation strategies included mandatory lockdowns, quarantines, and mask mandates. Emerging adults' (EA, age 16-25) unique developmental stage, with its focus on the development of identity, independence, and autonomy, places EAs at greater risk for sub-optimal diabetes management. In this study, ten EAs with T1D were recruited from a diabetes clinic within an urban children's hospital to participate in qualitative interviews during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (May-June 2020). Using framework analysis, two researchers analyzed interviews, where five themes emerged from EA's experiences were specific to COVID-19 (perceptions of the pandemic and strategies for coping with it) and three described personal experiences (disruptions to daily life, impacts on diabetes, and affective responses). Half the EAs interviewed agreed that having diabetes placed them at elevated risk for severe COVID-19 and strictly adhered to mitigation strategies. Disruptions in daily life included changes in sleeping, eating, and socialization patterns and economic stability (job loss and increased hours among essential workers). EAs' experienced challenges in maintaining their diabetes supplies and disruptions/irregularities in their diabetes care. EAs' described increased stress and worry. Understanding EAs' experiences may provide insight into their specific needs and how to support EAs with T1D during unexpected crises. In particular, telehealth has expanded during the pandemic to ensure access to mental and physical healthcare.