

# NEWS RELEASE

# AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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### **Study Finds Association between Sudden Death and Stimulant Medications Among Children and Adolescents**

**ARLINGTON, Va.** (June 15, 2009) — Researchers found support for an association between the use of stimulants and sudden unexplained death among children and adolescents, according to a study released today by *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.

The rate of stimulant use among 564 children and adolescents whose sudden deaths were attributed to cardiac dysrhythmia or unknown causes was 1.8 percent, compared to 0.4 percent for youth who died as passengers in motor vehicle accidents. Although stimulant use had a greater association with sudden unexplained death, the overall incidence of sudden explained death was still rare.

For some time, concerns have arisen that stimulants may increase the risk for sudden unexplained death in children. “Sudden Death and Use of Stimulant Medications in Youth” by Madelyn S. Gould, Ph.D., M.P.H. and colleagues is the first study to rigorously address concerns that the therapeutic use of stimulants, like amphetamine and dextroamphetamine, may increase the risk for sudden unexplained death in children. Most, but not all, of the stimulant use was prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

In an accompanying editorial, Benedetto Vitiello, M.D., and Kenneth Towbin, M.D., of the National Institute of Mental Health state that the findings of the study “should underscore that stimulants are not innocuous and that their therapeutic use requires careful diagnostic assessment, diligent safety screening, and ongoing monitoring. However, it is equally clear that sudden unexplained death is a rare event, this is only the first such study, it relies on small numbers, and it is not possible to quantify the risk beyond estimating that it is very small.”

Both the study and editorial were published online at [AJP in Advance](#), the online advance edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, the official journal of the American Psychiatric Association.

This study was supported in part by a contract from the Food and Drug Administration and a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. Other funding received by the individual authors is disclosed in the article itself.

*The American Journal of Psychiatry* is the oldest continuously published medical specialty journal in the United States and was recently named one of the “Most Influential Journals in Biology & Medicine of the Last 100 Years.” Statements in this press release or the articles in the *Journal* are not official policy statements of the American Psychiatric Association.

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