

RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Alpha-2 Agonist Often Used to Treat Preschool Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder Despite the Fact That They Have Not Been Studied in This Age Group

Approximately 1 percent of preschool age child are diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Guidelines for pediatricians recommend counseling as the initial treatment. Methylphenidate (a stimulant medication) is recommended if medication is needed, as it is the only medication that has been well studied in preschool age children. However, in school age children other medications such as norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors and alpha-2 agonists have been approved to treat ADHD. It is not known how often these medications are used to treat preschool age children.

In this study, we used data from the electronic health record at three DBPNet sites to determine the medications used by developmental-behavioral pediatricians to treat ADHD. Of 984 preschool aged children diagnosed with ADHD, 46 percent were treated with medication. Stimulant medications were used during the preschool period in 75 percent of those who got medication, and alpha-2 agonists were used in 53 percent of those who got medication. Some children got both medications.

The common use of alpha-2 agonists in preschool age children is remarkable in that these medications have not been studied in this age group.

Reference:

Blum NJ, Shults J, Harstad E, Wiley S, Augustyn M, Meinzen-Derr JK, Wolraich ML, Barbaresi WJ. Stimulants and Alpha-2 Agonists are Both Commonly Used to Treat Preschool Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A DBPNet Study. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 2018;39(7):531-537.