

# **UPDATE: Report: Kids' time spent on screen soars during the pandemic**

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Just when you thought children couldn't possibly spend more time with their faces buried in a screen, they have done just that.

Use of screen media per day is up 17% for teens (ages 13-18) and tweens (ages 8-12) from the start of the pandemic, according to Common Sense Media. And that doesn't take into account time spent attending school virtually and doing homework.

The 17% growth rate in 2020 and 2021 compares to a growth rate of 3% for tweens and 11% for teens for daily media use over the four years prior to the coronavirus pandemic, said the report, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021," issued March 23.

"In the first year of the pandemic, remote learning required many students to spend hours a day taking classes online. But many also turned to screen media to stay in touch with friends and family, to pursue hobbies and creative interests, and to keep themselves entertained," the report said.

The report considered the many ways young people use media: watching television regardless of how it comes to them; watching online videos; using social media; playing video or computer games; playing mobile video games; reading regardless of the configuration – e-books, reading online or reading print; using digital devices to create content; listening to podcasts; and using virtual reality.

Common Sense Media reported several key findings in the report.

– Media use shot up among both age groups studied in the first two years of the pandemic. Among tweens, the time they spent on media daily in 2015 was 4 hours, 36 seconds. It increased slightly in 2019 to 4:44, but zoomed to 5:39 in 2021. For teens, their daily media time grew from 6:40 in 2015 to 7:22 in 2019 and then to 8:39 in 2021.

– “If forced to choose, teens say YouTube is the site that they wouldn’t want to live without,” the report said. “In fact, watching online videos is the favorite media activity among 8- to 18-year-olds, appealing to both tweens and teens, boys and girls, and across racial/ethnic groups and income levels.”

Among all respondents, 32% said they wouldn’t want to live without YouTube. Snapchat came in second at 20%, while TikTok and Instagram were tied for third at 13% each.

– “Use of social media is growing among 8- to 12-year-olds,” the report noted. About 38% said they use some kind of social media, with – Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Discord and Pinterest leading the way.

– “Teens now spend nearly an hour and a half a day using social media,” Common Sense Media said, “but have conflicted feelings about the medium.” Teens’ top choices are the same as the tweens, except that Twitter is fifth instead of Pinterest among teens.

– “Among both tweens and teens, there are substantial variations in the average amount of screen media engaged with each day, by gender, race/ethnicity and household income,” the report said.

Without getting into breakdowns of numbers, the report said that among tweens, boys use more screen time than girls, Hispanics and Blacks do so more than whites, and low-income households more so than medium- or high-income households. Among teens, the same usage rates apply, except that middle-

income teens edge out Hispanics.

– “Though children consumed more media overall after the pandemic than they had before,” the report said, “one form of media (activity) did not increase in usage: reading.” Among tweens, 12% said they never read; among teens, 18% said in 2021 they never read.

– There are other forms of media where less than half engage with them, meaning either there’s a finite limit to the time kids spend with media – or that there’s still room for growth. One of those is podcasts. Only 46% of all teens said they’ve listened to podcasts, but one in five said they do so at least once a week, according to Common Sense Media. Garnering even lower percentages was virtual reality.

– Large numbers of Black and Hispanic households, and children in lower-income households, still do not have access to a computer at home, one of the most basic building blocks of digital equity. Common Sense estimated that only two-thirds of low-income families have access to a computer. By race, Black and Hispanic families have percentages in the low 80s when it comes to home computer access.

“Watching television is something young people devote a substantial amount of time to each day regardless of gender, race/ethnicity or household income,” the report said. Majorities in all ethnic groups: 73% of Blacks, 56% of Hispanic/Latino, and 52% of whites.

However, “television loses some of its appeal as young people grow from the tween years to the teen years,” it noted. Just 27% of teens said they enjoy watching television “a lot,” while two years before, one-third of teens said the same. That’s still far fewer than the 62% who enjoy watching online videos.

Common Sense Media’s figures are based on an online survey of 1,306 8- to 18-year-olds in the United States conducted last

fall, from Sept. 29 to Oct. 25. The margin of error in the full sample is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

Common Sense said it contacted a parent or legal guardian first, and permission was received for the tween or teen to participate. No money was given to participate or enable participation, it added.

The full survey can [be found here](#).