

"How the Pandemic Aged Teen Brains"

The stress of living through the COVID-19 pandemic prematurely aged adolescents' brains by at least three or four years, according to a Stanford University study, *Axios' Sabrina Moreno reports*.

Why it matters: While the behavioral effects of the pandemic are well-documented, data on youths' neurological development has been scarce.

What they found: In a comparison of 163 teenage MRI scans — half of which were taken before the pandemic and half after — the "after" group displayed accelerated signs of aging commonly seen in children experiencing violence and neglect.

- The youths studied were also more likely to report severe anxiety, depression and internalizing mental health problems.

Yes, but: Accelerated aging of the brain is not necessarily a bad thing, said Ian Gotlib, the study's lead author and a Stanford psychology professor.

- "These are 16-, 18-year-olds. They're not atrophying in the alarmist sense," Gotlib told Axios.
- "For me, the cause for concern is their higher rates of depression and anxiety and sadness."

What's next: Researchers will follow up with these participants in two years to see if the aging continues accelerating.