

**Abstract:**

Lollapalooza is an annual music festival that brings hundreds of thousands of concert-goers to Chicago, many of whom are adolescents. Emergency departments (EDs) see a surge of adolescent patients during seasonal events such as this, which places a strain on resources and provides unique challenges. The variation in care that Lollapalooza patients receive has served as a source of data for quality improvement initiatives within our ED.

**Keywords:**

Intoxication; variation; quality improvement

# One Hospital's Experience With an Annual Surge of Intoxicated Teens

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The paramedics wheel a gurney down the hall from the ambulance bay toward the emergency department (ED); on the gurney is a teenage girl who is sweaty, covered in dirt, clothing soiled with emesis. Her eyes are closed; she is moaning intermittently, barely responsive to the lights and noises surrounding her. She is delivered to room 8, where a team of nurses, paramedics, and physicians are poised and waiting to resuscitate her. Next door, in room 9, is a 15-year-old girl. She is gagging, heaving, and vomiting all over her tank top and fanny pack. In between wretches she is sobbing uncontrollably, repeating over and over again, "My mom is going to kill me!" Next to her, in room 10, is a belligerent and drunk 16-year-old boy insisting that he can go home. He vomits multiple times, then spits on everyone who enters the room to try to help him get cleaned up. The moment his nurse leaves the room, he takes off running for what he believes to be an exit, only to discover that he has run right into the dead-end elevator bay. He sulk as he is escorted back to room 10 by a security officer. What do all of these patients have in common? Aside from their incessant vomiting and odor of alcohol, they all have a neon yellow bracelet on their left wrist: the entrance wristband for a local music festival.

## MUSIC FESTIVALS AND TEENAGER INTOXICATION

Lollapalooza is an annual music festival in Chicago that draws hundreds of thousands of audience members, including an estimated 20 000 adolescents. What began 25 years ago as a simple outdoor music festival with a mission to showcase local

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bands has more recently evolved into a 4-day-long party, with alcohol and drug use running rampant among attendees.

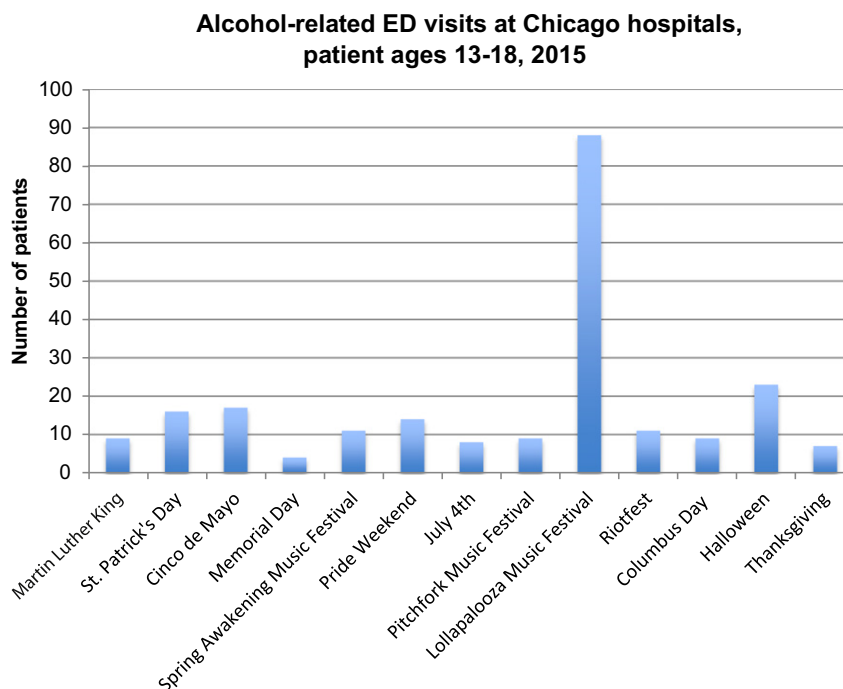
Local Chicago EDs see a surge of patients annually during Lollapalooza weekend. McAndrew et al reviewed citywide hospital data and found an astounding 11-fold increase in the number of adolescent alcohol-related hospital visits during Lollapalooza weekend compared with other weekends throughout the year.<sup>1</sup> This data was visually represented in an infographic on Lurie Children's Hospital's Health and Wellness blog<sup>2</sup> showing that the number of adolescent alcohol-related ED visits during Lollapalooza weekend outnumber every other holiday and festival weekend in Chicago (Figure 1). Lollapalooza is not unique among large public events in its tendency to cause a surge in medical problems related to risky youth behaviors. Young people are well-documented to behave badly when it comes to major events and holidays. Two large studies in Canada and Australia revealed that there is a substantial increase in the number of ED visits and inpatient admissions on the weekends of and preceding major national holidays as well as individuals' birthdays.<sup>3,4</sup>

## OUR INSTITUTION'S EXPERIENCE

Since moving to its downtown location in June 2012, Lurie Children's Hospital has joined the other downtown hospitals in experiencing the full impact

of “Lolla weekend”. The number of intoxicated patients seen specifically in our ED during Lolla weekend outnumbers the sum total of all other weekends of the year combined. The most common health problem bringing patients to medical attention at the festival itself is heat-related illness. However, the vast majority (>90%) of Lollapalooza-related medical complaints that present to local EDs are due to intoxication, from alcohol as well as other recreational drugs.<sup>1</sup>

Our ED prepares for Lollapalooza the way that other medical centers have prepared for mass gatherings, and there is ample literature on this topic. Large national and international events such as marathon races, the World Cup, and the Olympics are the subjects of publications describing how event producers and local hospitals can prepare for an expected surge in patients with a variety of medical problems.<sup>5-8</sup> These preparations have gained additional urgency as planners must consider these events as potential targets for acts of violence or terrorism and the potential need to provide mass casualty care. In general, these plans involve a clear hierarchy of medical decision-makers, structured communication systems, overstaffing of emergency personnel, and dissemination of information to the community about what to expect during the large event. What these types of studies do not address is how the EDs themselves will respond to the surge of patients once



**Figure 1.** Alcohol-related ED visits at Chicago hospitals for patient aged 13 to 18 years, in 2015. Adapted from: Lurie Children's Blog. <http://blog.luriechildrens.org/2016/07/underage-drinking-chicago/>.

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