

## **Don't Delay Pediatric Rehab**

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Parents always want to do what's best for their children. Sometimes that requires a little extra help, particularly if a child has a developmental delay.

Abigail Harper, 8, has cerebral palsy due to a brain abnormality and receives physical therapy in school and through OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois. She works on strengthening her legs, ankles, core muscles, and balance, which helps her overall mobility.

When COVID-19 forced schools to close, Abigail lost an important resource. Couple that with outpatient medical providers being forced to stop what were deemed non-essential services for a couple of months in an effort to stem the potential spread of the virus, it's not surprising Abigail's mother saw a regression in her physical abilities.

"It's just sad to see her legs get tighter because now she does have to get some serial casting done where they'll put casts on her legs to stretch her, and I feel like if we had been getting therapy through school and outside through OSF that we would not have to do that, because we've never had to do that before. Even just the limited amount I can do at home is just not enough, she needs that extra boost of therapy," said Sarah Harper.

"We challenge them a little differently than they are challenged at home, making them do a little bit harder things. So that keeps them on their toes and working harder."

Saundi Pugh is Abigail's physical therapist at OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois. From March until early May, Abigail received no therapy services because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When she returned, her muscles were significantly tighter, which caused other trickle down effects such as her falling more, because of a loss of range of motion.

While there may have been some initial hesitation to return to therapy, Pugh says her team has reassured parents that they have always had a higher level of cleaning standards since they work with children and are doing everything they can to keep them safe, like thoroughly cleaning between patients and wearing a mask.

Pugh says a return to therapy has also been a plus for parents.

"It's been positive for the parents, too, because it's really stressful for a parent and the parent with special-needs it's even more so. So they're having to do not only all the stuff they normally do but then extra stretches and extra stuff to make up for the activity they're not getting so it's nice for them to have a little bit of coming in and getting reassured."

Pugh admits the therapists have missed seeing their "kids" and have also benefitted from the emotional boost of them returning to therapy.

For Sarah Harper, the extra safety precautions are evident, and seeing Abigail's continued improvement is worth it.

"It's very clean and everyone always has their mask on, they take your temperature. I like that the waiting room but there's not a lot of people in the waiting room it's like spaced out so you don't feel like you're sitting like right on top of other people."

Additionally, the pediatric therapy team at OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois has expanded its use of telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic for a variety of services, including video technology for follow-up visits with babies born prematurely and early intervention evaluations and sessions.

Pugh says telehealth has increased parental involvement in some cases, particularly in rural areas or for those who may be immunocompromised where travel to a center with the services they need may be difficult. Pugh says they are able to offer the reassurance or support a parent needs online.

Learn more about the [pediatric rehabilitation services](#) at OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois.