**Teenagers mental health problems and social media**

There's a new study that confirms depression and other serious mental health issues have become more common among teens and young adults. It's not clear why, though some of the researchers believe social media is a factor. NPR's Patti Neighmond reports on the study published by the American Psychological Association.

PATTI NEIGHMOND, BYLINE: Researchers from San Diego State University analyzed government data which tracks mental health among Americans of all ages. Psychologist Jean Twenge headed the study, which looked at depression, suicidal thoughts and psychological distress.

JEAN TWENGE: And they include things like feeling nervous, feeling hopeless or feeling that everything was an effort.

NEIGHMOND: She found that since 2005, these mental health problems increased significantly among teenagers and young adults under 26. But among adults 26 and older, these problems remained relatively stable, which raises the question, says Twenge, why such a dramatic rise among the young? Her study was not able to pinpoint a reason, but she has some ideas.

TWENGE: It happens that 2012 is the year when smartphones became common. And it's around the time that social media moved from being optional to mandatory, especially among teens.

NEIGHMOND: Mandatory in the sense that if you're not online, you're missing out on a lot. Twenge says it's not the phone or social media itself. It's the amount of time spent looking, surfing, posting, which can add up to eight or nine hours a day for some kids, which means more time online than in person.