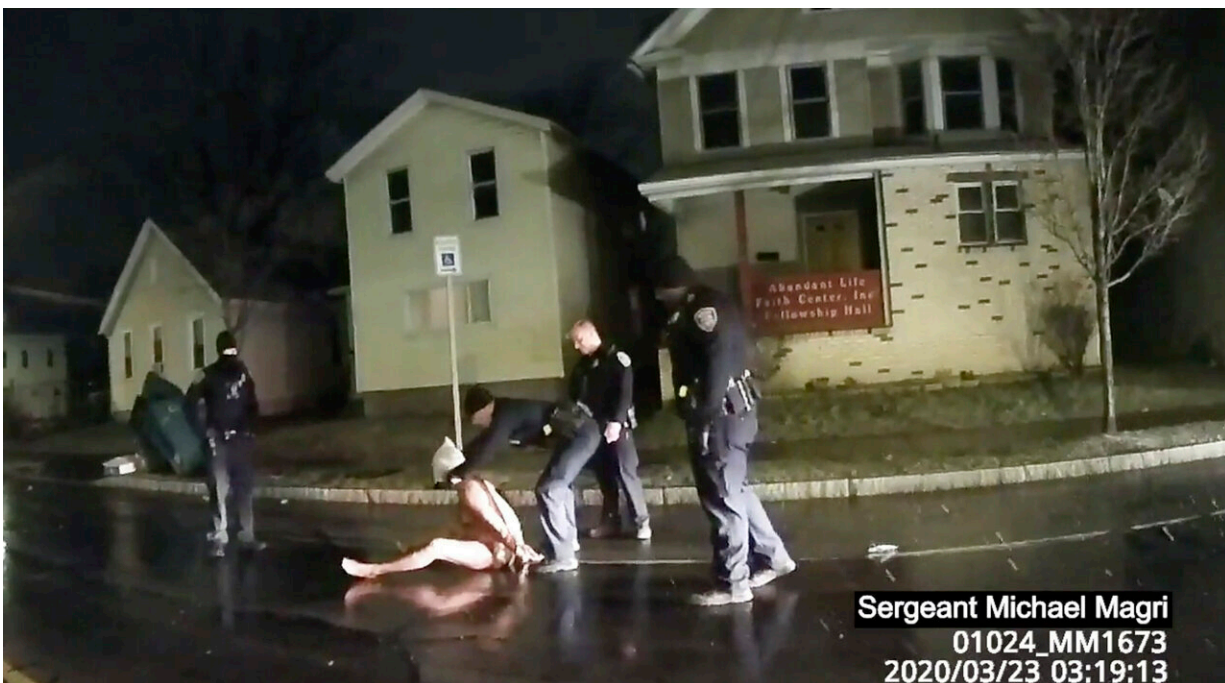


# A doctors group calls its 'excited delirium' paper outdated and withdraws its approval

October 13 2023, by Carla K. Johnson



This image from police body camera video provided by Roth and Roth LLP, shows a Rochester police officer as he puts a hood over the head of Daniel Prude in Rochester, N.Y., March 23, 2020. Prude died after police held him down until he stopped breathing after encountering him running naked through the snowy streets of Rochester, NY. On Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023, a leading doctors group has formally withdrawn its approval of a 2009 paper on “excited delirium,” a document that critics say has been used to justify excessive force by police. Credit: Rochester Police via Roth and Roth LLP via AP, File

A leading doctors group on Thursday formally withdrew its approval of a 2009 paper on "excited delirium," a document that critics say has been used to justify excessive force by police.

The American College of Emergency Physicians in a statement called the paper outdated and said the term excited delirium should not be used by members who testify in civil or criminal cases. The group's directors voted on the matter Thursday in Philadelphia.

"This means if someone dies while being restrained in custody... people can't point to excited delirium as the reason and can't point to ACEP's endorsement of the concept to bolster their case," said Dr. Brooks Walsh, a Connecticut emergency doctor who pushed the organization to strengthen its stance.

Earlier this week, California became the first state to bar the use of excited delirium and related terms as a cause of death in autopsies. The legislation, signed Sunday by Gov. Gavin Newsom, also prohibits [police officers](#) from using it in reports to describe people's behavior.

In March, the National Association of Medical Examiners took a stand against the term, saying it should not be listed as a cause of death. Other medical groups, including the American Medical Association, had previously rejected excited delirium as a diagnosis. Critics have called it unscientific and rooted in racism.

The emergency physicians' 2009 report said excited delirium's symptoms included unusual strength, pain tolerance and bizarre behavior and called the condition "potentially life-threatening."

The document reinforced and codified [racial stereotypes](#), Walsh said.

The 14-year-old publication has shaped [police](#) training and still figures in

police custody death cases, many involving Black men who died after being restrained by police. Attorneys defending officers have cited the paper to admit testimony on excited delirium, said Joanna Naples-Mitchell, an attorney and research adviser for Physicians for Human Rights, which produced [a report last year](#) on the diagnosis and deaths in police custody.

In 2021, the emergency physicians' paper was cited in the New York attorney general's report on the investigation into the death of Daniel Prude, a 41-year-old Black man. A [grand jury](#) rejected charges against police officers in that case.

Excited [delirium](#) came up during the 2021 trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was later convicted in the death of George Floyd. This fall, the term resurfaced during the ongoing trials of police officers charged in the deaths of Elijah McClain in Colorado and Manuel Ellis in Washington state. Floyd, McClain and Ellis were Black men who died after being restrained by police.

The [emergency physicians](#) group had distanced itself from the term previously, but it had stopped short of withdrawing its support for the 2009 paper.

"This is why we pushed to put out a stronger statement explicitly disavowing that [paper](#)," Naples-Mitchell said. "It's a chance for ACEP to really break with the past."

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