

Community-based COVID-19 testing site highlights importance of understanding virus' impact

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A new study looking at the results of testing children for COVID-19 through a Children's National Hospital community-based testing site found that one in four patients had a positive test. The findings, reported online Dec. 18 in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, reinforce that children and young adults are impacted by the virus more than originally believed, and that the continued understanding of their role in transmitting COVID-19 is essential to getting the virus under control.

Of the 1,445 patients tested at the specimen collection site for SARS-CoV-2 virus between March 21 and May 16, 2020, the median age was 8 years old, and more than 34% of positive patients were Hispanic, followed by non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic white. The daily positivity rate increased over the study period, from 5.4% during the first week to a peak of 47.4% in May. Children and adolescents were referred to the testing site because of risk of exposure or mild symptoms.

"We knew that community-based testing sites were key in minimizing exposure risk to other patients and [health care workers](#), preserving PPE, centralizing specimen collection services, mitigating acute care site overcrowding and informing our community of the burden caused by this disease," says Joelle Simpson, M.D., medical director of Emergency Preparedness at Children's National.

Drive-through/walk-up testing sites outside of a traditional acute care setting have emerged around the world to meet the need for testing mildly ill or asymptomatic individuals. In March, Children's National Hospital opened a drive-up/walk-up location—one of the first exclusively pediatric testing sites for the virus in the U.S.—where primary care doctors in the Washington, D.C., region could refer [young patients](#) for COVID-19 specimen collection and testing.

"At first, children were not the target of testing initiatives, but it is clear that making testing available to [pediatric patients](#) early was a very important part of the pandemic response," says Meghan Delaney, D.O., M.P.H., chief of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at Children's National. "Not only can children get severe disease, they can be part of positive clusters with the adults they live with. The knowledge we have gained by testing many thousands of children over the pandemic has provided key information."

Compared with non-Hispanic white children and after adjustments for age, sex and distance of residence from specimen collection site, minority children had a higher likelihood of infection.

"We wanted to identify the features of children tested at this site who did not require acute medical care and be able to compare demographic and clinical differences between patients who tested

positive and negative for COVID-19," says Dr. Simpson.

Patients with COVID-19 exposure and symptoms were more likely to have a positive test than patients without symptoms. This supports contact tracing for symptomatic cases and testing as an important tool in detecting and containing community spread, according to the study's findings. Although most patients were referred because they lived with a family member with high risk for exposure or infection, this was not associated with positive [test](#) results.

"The impact of this virus is broad and affects planning for children, especially as schools and childcare centers work to reopen," Dr. Simpson says. "In order to guide the development of measures to control the ongoing pandemic, we need better understand the transmission potential of these mildly symptomatic or well [children](#) and [young adults](#)."

More information: Joelle N. Simpson, M.D., M.P.H. et al, Results of Testing Children for SARS-CoV-2 through a Community-based Testing Site, *The Journal of Pediatrics* Published: December 18, 2020 DOI:doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.12.030

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