

Schools, day care not a big factor in kids getting COVID: study

18 December 2020, by Steven Reinberg



As a rule, COVID-19 spreads rapidly in most groups, but new research suggests that schools and day care centers appear to be the exception.

Among those under 18, the virus is easily spread by close contact with [family members](#) who have COVID-19 and at gatherings where people don't wear masks, but going to [school](#) wasn't linked to positive COVID-19 tests, according to the researchers.

Schools where people wear masks and keep at least 6-feet apart are places where the virus is less likely to spread, said study author Dr. Charlotte Hobbs, a professor of pediatric infectious disease and microbiology at Children's Hospital of Mississippi in Jackson.

"We've got to play by the rules. Otherwise, we will have situations in which children will not be able to go to school because of outbreaks," she said. However, "if schools are able to abide by the measures recommended by the [U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention], kids should be able to go to school safely."

But for schools to be safe, they need a lot of help, support and equipment to keep the virus from spreading, Hobbs said.

The report was published Dec. 15 in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Dr. Marc Siegel, a professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, said that schools should be regularly testing students and staff for COVID-19.

"Also, if you're a kid and you come into contact with someone that has it, you should get tested," Siegel said.

If a child tests positive for the virus they should be kept out of school, he said, but unless there is a severe outbreak, it's not necessary to close a school.

"If you're in an area where there's rampant spread and it starts to infiltrate the school, you have the option of closing it," Siegel said.

For schools and parents, he added, "If they're handled properly with precautions—distancing, masking and testing—you're probably more worried about it than you need to be."

For the study, Hobbs and her colleagues did a telephone survey of nearly 400 children, some who had tested positive for COVID-19 and others who hadn't.

The researchers found that most of those who were infected were exposed to the virus by a family member or had attended a gathering like a [birthday party](#), wedding or funeral where many people didn't wear masks or keep 6-feet apart, Hobbs said.

Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency medicine physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, said, "It's clear that having close contact with people with COVID-19 and attending gatherings outside the household are contributing factors in SARS-CoV-2 infections in children and adolescents."

Glatter stressed that "we must continue to promote behavior that reduces exposures to SARS-CoV-2 in children and teens in the household and community, but also in schools and child care programs."

It's imperative that people stress the importance of wearing [face masks](#) and physical distancing as essential measures to prevent transmission of COVID-19, Glatter said.

"This is essential for preventing COVID-19 outbreaks at schools and child care programs, which will be crucial to slowing COVID-19 transmission," he added.

More information: For more on COVID-19 and schools, head to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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