

Study finds very low numbers of COVID-19 outbreaks in schools

- only 0.01% of open educational settings had an outbreak
- out of more than 1 million children attending pre-school and primary school in June, just 70 children were affected
- infections in the wider community likely driving cases in schools
- children were more likely to acquire SARS-CoV-2 infection at home than in school

Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreaks and infections in schools are rare, a new study by Public Health England (PHE) shows.

Just 67 individual cases were detected and 30 outbreaks among students and staff after schools reopened in June until they closed for the summer. Only 0.01% of pre-schools and primary schools had an outbreak, all of which were successfully contained and 70 children and 128 staff were affected. Over the same period, there were 25,470 cases recorded in England as a whole.

Reported COVID-19 cases, clusters and outbreaks were reviewed daily across all educational settings in England until the end of July.

PHE found that there were more likely to be outbreaks in those areas that also had a high COVID-19 incidence, suggesting transmission in the community was driving the spread in schools. This demonstrates the continued need to control the spread of infection in the community to help keep schools open, with all playing their part by washing their hands, wearing face coverings, keeping distance and getting a test if they have symptoms.

Staff members were more likely to be affected by the virus than students, though not more likely than the general population as a whole. Where children did contract the infection, they were most likely to catch COVID-19 at home, usually from a parent. Half the outbreaks did not involve any students at all and transmission between students was very rare.

The research, [SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England](#), has been submitted to the Lancet.

Dr Shamez Ladhani, Public Health England, said:

SARS-CoV2 infections and outbreaks were uncommon in educational settings during the first month after the easing of national lockdown in England. The strong correlation with regional SARS-CoV-2 incidence emphasises the importance of controlling community transmission to protect educational settings. Additional interventions should focus on reducing transmission in and among staff members.

Background

The probable source in 20 of the 30 outbreaks was staff-to-staff or staff-to-student transmission. Student-to-staff transmission was the likely source in 6 cases, and student-to-student in 2. The transmission source could not be established in 2 outbreaks.

Although not all school years were open during the study period, the number of open educational settings in England rose from 20,500 to 23,400 between 1 and 30 June, and the number of children attending any educational setting increased from 475,000 to 1,646,000.

The results of this study are consistent with other research into the extent to which children are affected by COVID-19. PHE's school serosurveillance study (sKIDs) will examine rates of antibody prevalence across educational settings. Preliminary results of that study are expected in the coming weeks.