

Study: Working in child care not linked to COVID-19 risk early in pandemic

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For the latest news on COVID-19, visit <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

Child care workers in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have increased odds of contracting SARS-CoV-2, according to a new study, which noted many programs were taking precautions.

Researchers from Yale University surveyed more than 57,000 U.S. child care providers in late May and early June, asking whether programs stayed open, what safety measures the program put in place and what precautions staff took in their personal lives.

Just under half of the programs stayed open or re-opened after a brief closure. A suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 led to closures of about 9% of those, according to “COVID-19 Transmission in US Child Care Programs,” (Gilliam WS, et al. *Pediatrics*. Oct. 14, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-031971>).

The surveys showed that of the child care programs that continued to operate, 90% or more reported staff and children washed their hands frequently and indoor surfaces were disinfected daily. More than half disinfected indoor surfaces three times a day. Most programs performed daily symptom screenings and temperature checks of children and staff and practiced social distancing. Just over half kept children in cohorts that did not mix. However, daily face mask wearing was only 12% for children ages 2 and older and 35% for staff.

There were 427 child care providers who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2; researchers compared them to staff who did not contract the virus as well as to a group of matched controls. They found no association

between contracting the virus and exposure to child care.

Odds of having COVID-19 were linked to being American Indian/Alaska Native, Latinx or Black. Taking personal precautions was linked to lower likelihood of contracting the virus.

“None of these covariates, however, interacted with exposure to child care, suggesting a lack of association between child care exposure and COVID-19 outcome regardless of these other factors,” authors wrote.

One factor that did play an important role was the level of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the community.

“Even after adjusting for other variables, community-level transmission remained a significant predictor of child care providers testing positive or being hospitalized for COVID-19, highlighting the importance of reopening child care programs only when background transmission rates are low and decreasing,” authors wrote.

They could not say for certain whether their findings would have been different if so many child care programs hadn’t been taking precautions to minimize the spread of the virus. The study also did not look at transmission between children or from adults to children. Authors cautioned the results cannot be applied to schools or universities.

They recommend child care workers wear face coverings to protect children.

“Furthermore, protective measures against COVID-19 in child care centers are needed as the spread of COVID-19 from child care workers to children may lead to children’s family members, including those most vulnerable to the virus (e.g. the elderly and individuals with underlying medical conditions), contracting COVID-19 from their children or grandchildren,” they wrote.

The latest [data from the AAP and Children’s Hospital Association](#) show there have been at least 697,633 child COVID-19 cases in the U.S., and children make up about 10.7% of all cases.

Resources

- [Information from the CDC about COVID-19 for health care professionals](#)
- [Information about COVID-19 from the AAP Red Book](#)
- [Information about COVID-19 from the AAP](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on coronavirus](#)