

Researchers at AAP, CHA turn state COVID data into national weekly snapshot

April 1, 2022

Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff, Associate Editor

Article type: [Did you know?](#)

Topics: [COVID-19](#), [Infectious Diseases](#), [International Child Health](#), [Research Methods & Statistics](#), [Vaccine/Immunization](#)

When the pandemic began, AAP Research staff started searching for data on how it was impacting children to inform AAP leadership.

That effort soon grew into a joint report with the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) that has become the definitive resource for medical professionals and media alike. The Children and COVID-19: State-level Data Report is the best publicly available data on trends in pediatric COVID-19 case counts and related metrics.

Every week, research analysts like AAP Research/Database Analyst Chloe Somberg methodically record into a database the latest figures reported on pediatric COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths from the health department websites of 49 states, New York City, Puerto Rico and Guam. They later added vaccination data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a separate report.

The team transforms the data into bullet points, charts, graphs and summaries. They work around barriers such as changes in how some states report data, including a few that stopped reporting their metrics altogether. Limitations are noted in the report's footnotes.

The highlights and trends appear in a highly anticipated summary and full report on Mondays at <https://bit.ly/3yw74Zz>.

As the pandemic progressed, the researchers could "see" how the virus spread across the country and how the narrative touted by some that children weren't impacted by the virus was so wrong.

A [research brief on the national trends](#) in pediatric cases, based on the state data reports, was published in the December 2020 issue of *Pediatrics*.

The AAP media relations staff stepped in to manage inquiries about the data from journalists, public health officials, parents and grandparents.

What happened was beyond expectations, said Lynn Olson, Ph.D., AAP vice president of research, on the [AAP podcast Pediatrics On Call](#). She discussed the data report on the program last December along with William Cull, Ph.D., senior director of research.

"This (the report) would not have happened and would not have become the standard if we weren't at the American Academy of Pediatrics — if it wasn't connected with our experts, our committees and our ... staff and leaders," Dr. Olson later noted.

While the data acquisition process does not reflect the AAP's usual approach when analyzing trends in child health and health care, it has proven an effective tool.

"We realized from the outset that this isn't the typical research process — we didn't have years to plan and coordinate ... but the information was there, and so that was impressive," Dr. Cull said.

Added Dr. Olson: "As researchers, you have to give up the idea of perfect data but look for what can actually be helpful to inform you."

The data also have taught them the unpredictability of the virus.

"Sobering" is how Dr. Olson describes what it's like for the team to be the first in the country to have seen case counts turn into bleak milestones, such as a quarter million infections in children when the delta wave hit or when the count surpassed 1 million due to omicron.

Somberg also recalls being shocked after seeing the omicron numbers. "The peak that we remember from delta was 250,000 child cases added in a week," she said.

On Jan. 20, however, it was 1.5 million cases due to omicron. "Just seeing those numbers after collecting all day took my breath away a little bit," Somberg said.

Analysts may be breathing easier as COVID numbers improve, but their work carries on.