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## Covid-19: Schools are not hubs of infection and are safe to reopen after summer break, study shows

Adrian O'Dowd

The prevalence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in schools in England was lower in June this year than during the autumn term of 2020, a new study shows.

The covid-19 schools infection survey, run jointly by the Office for National Statistics, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Public Health England, was published on 11 August.<sup>1</sup> Its findings confirm the belief that schools are not hubs of infection, the authors said, and question whether schools needed to be closed during recent lockdowns.

This latest and sixth round of the survey was carried out in June across 141 primary and secondary schools in England. The study looked at the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection among a sample of pupils and staff. It involved 3819 staff and 12 485 pupils—4243 from primary schools and 8242 from secondary schools—who underwent at least one SARS-CoV-2 infection or antibody test.

The results showed that 0.27% of primary school pupils tested positive, showing little change from the result of testing carried out in May 2021, when 0.65% tested positive.

In secondary schools 0.42% of students tested positive in June, an increase from May (0.05%) but lower level than in November (1.48%) and December 2020 (1.22%).

In secondary schools 0.27% of staff tested positive in June, similar to the level in March 2021 (0.19%) and lower than in the autumn term of 2020.

Patrick Nguipod-Djomo, assistant professor of epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and co-investigator of the study, said the results showed that infections in schools mostly reflected patterns of infection seen in the wider community. "Thus measures to reduce community transmission remain important," he said.

Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh, added that it was reassuring that, despite the advent of the delta variant, infection rates in schools during the summer term of 2021 were actually lower than during the autumn term of 2020. "It is possible this is at least partly due to mitigation measures implemented in schools, including routine testing," he said.

Woolhouse added that the report did not raise any immediate concerns about the reopening of schools after the summer holidays.

"A key question for the planned inquiry into covid-19 in the UK is whether there was ever any need to close schools at all. The epidemiological evidence to date suggests the answer may be no," he said.

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics. Covid-19 schools infection survey, England: round 6, June 2021. 11 Aug 2021. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/covid19schoolsinfectionsurveyengland/round6june2021>.

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