

Researchers testing children across British Columbia for COVID-19 antibodies

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Credit: Kelly Sikkema/Unsplash

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in British Columbia, a critical question remains on the role babies, children, teens and young adults play in transmission of the novel coronavirus.

Dr. Manish Sadarangani, associate professor in the UBC department of pediatrics and director of the Vaccine Evaluation Center at BC Children's Hospital, is leading a research project that aims to provide further clues to this question.

Called the SPRING study, the project is seeking to determine how many 0- to 24-year-olds in B.C. have already been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, as well as how the infection rate in this age group changes over the next year. Results will be used to create models of different policy scenarios to help inform decision-making around maintaining or relaxing physical distancing measures.

In this Q&A, Sadarangani explains the purpose of the study, how the team is conducting the research, and how children and [young adults](#) across the province can get involved.

Why is it important to understand how many children and young adults have COVID-19 antibodies?

So far, we have little information on COVID-19 in children because there have been relatively few cases. Some studies suggest infection rates in children are actually the same as in adults, children simply often having no symptoms. But other studies suggest fewer children get COVID-19. Our study aims to get a better estimate of a true infection rate by including information from children with asymptomatic infection.

How will you be carrying out this study?

Our team is mailing several thousand antibody testing kits to children and young adults under the age of 25 across B.C. The testing kits allow participants to collect samples and then mail them to us. The team will

also send a companion survey to ask parents about their children's exposure risks – such as if they are being compliant with distancing guidelines and mask wearing, and whether they go to school or work and their modes of transportation.

The research team will then analyze the samples to search for antibody proteins from serological tests to better understand how many [children](#) in B.C. already have COVID-19 antibodies. The team will take a step further to see if any patterns of infection emerge among different population groups.

How can British Columbians get involved in this study?

Our team is actively recruiting participants among the five different age categories (under five, five to nine, 10 to 14, 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 years of age) from anywhere in B.C. Participation requires a consent form, an online questionnaire, and a home finger prick test. Researchers will inform parents/participants if their child or they have antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, although that still does not guarantee immunity against the virus that causes COVID-19. To participate in the study please visit the website: www.bcchr.ca/springstudy

Provided by University of British Columbia

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