

# No evidence that schools are playing a significant role in driving spread of the COVID-19

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New research led by epidemiologists at the University of Warwick has found that there is no significant evidence that schools are playing a significant role in driving the spread of the COVID-19 disease in the

community, particularly in primary schools. However, careful continued monitoring may be required as schools re-open to stay well informed about the effect they have upon community incidence.

The paper examines data on [school](#) absences from September 2020 to December 2020 as a result of COVID-19 infection, and how that varied through time as other measures in the community were introduced.

The new research has just been published in a preprint paper that has yet to be peer reviewed, entitled: "An analysis of school absences in England during the COVID-19 pandemic."

The paper notes in particular that:

- Cases in teachers were seen to decline during the November lockdown, particularly in those regions that had previously been in Tier 3, the highest level of control at the time.
- In many regions cases in secondary school pupils increased for the first two weeks of the November lockdown, before decreasing."
- Since the introduction of the tier system, the number of absences owing to confirmed infection in [primary schools](#) was observed to be significantly lower than in secondary schools across all regions and tiers.

In December, the data indicates a large rise in the number of absences per school in secondary school settings in the South East and Greater London, but such rises were not observed in other regions or in primary school settings. The researchers conjecture that the increased transmissibility of the new variant in these regions may have contributed to this rise in cases in secondary schools.

The researchers observed a positive correlation between cases in the

community and cases in schools in some regions, with some weak evidence suggesting that cases in schools actually lag behind cases in the surrounding community.

The corresponding author on the paper Dr. Mike Tildesley from the University of Warwick said:

"Our analysis of recorded school absences as a result of infection with COVID-19 suggest that the risk is much lower in primary than [secondary schools](#) and we do not find evidence to suggest that school attendance is a significant driver of outbreaks in the community."

Dr. Edward Hill also from the University of Warwick said:

"During the first two weeks of the November lockdown we observed an increase in pupil absence as a result of infection with COVID-19, yet in the following weeks the data indicates that in several regions there was no subsequent rise in COVID-19 caused teacher absence. It is important to note that our findings only refer to cases reported in school children and teachers, and do not provide an indication as to whether these individuals were infected within the school environment. "

Provided by University of Warwick

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