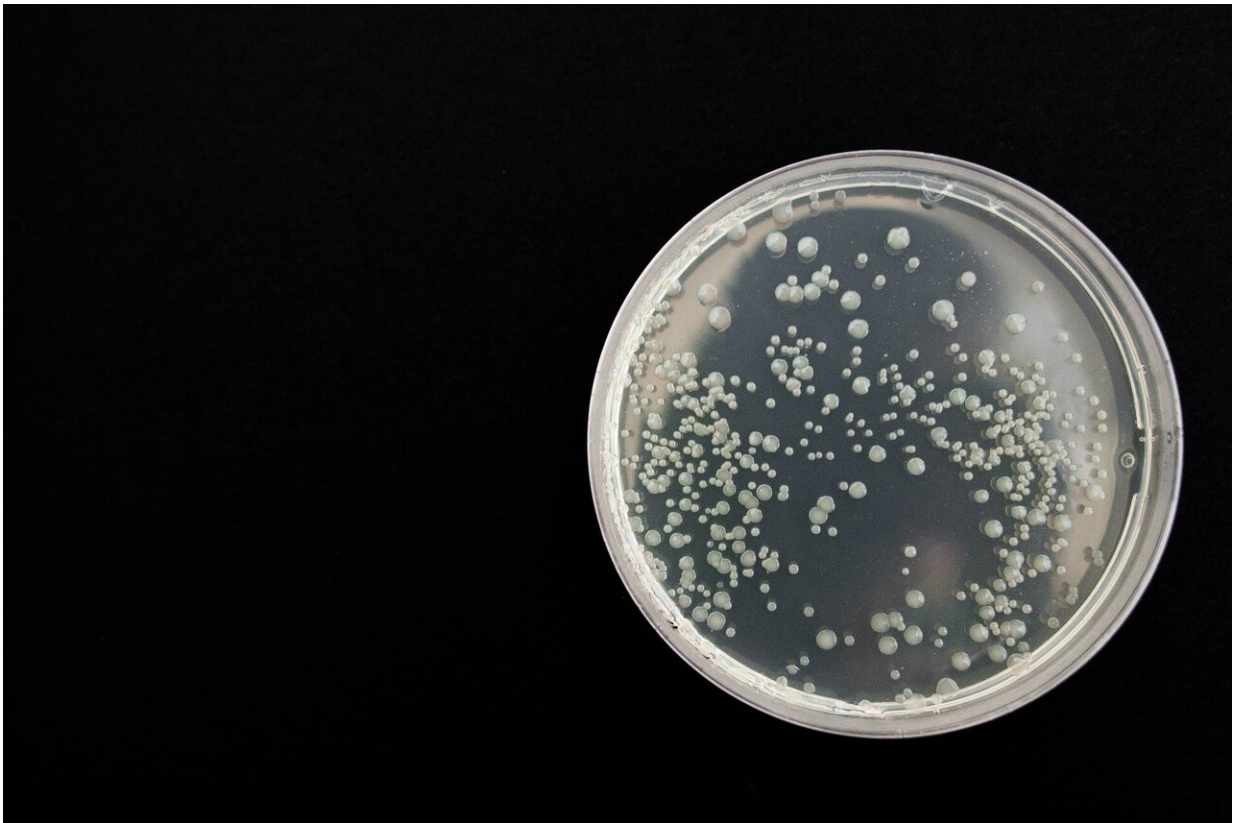


COVID-19 protocols led to decrease in kids being hospitalized for infections

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Public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 led to a substantial decrease in children being hospitalized for infections last year, a new study has found and continuing these behaviors may help

prevent severe respiratory conditions post-pandemic.

The research led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and the Victorian Department of Health and published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, highlights the role of non-drug interventions such as good hand hygiene and physical distancing in reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

With an unseasonal rise in respiratory conditions among [children](#) earlier this year following the lifting of stringent lockdowns, the researchers suggested the simple [public health measures](#), that were so effective against COVID-19, were likely to be effective against all types of [infection](#) post-pandemic.

The study reviewed hospitalization data for those aged under 18 years in Victoria from 2015 to October 3, 2020.

It found a 65 percent reduction in infection-related hospitalisations among children in the seven months following the introduction of pandemic infection control strategies last year compared with the prior five years.

Hospitalization rates decreased by 66 percent for children under five years, and by 40 percent for children aged 10-17 years. The greatest reductions were seen for lower respiratory infections, which declined by 85 percent.

Victorian Department of Health researcher Isobel Todd said the various strategies implemented to control COVID-19 had limited the spread of other infectious diseases and lessened the burden on the healthcare system.

"Enhanced hand hygiene, physical distancing, school and business

closures, and restrictions to travel and social gatherings collectively resulted in a drastic decline in infection-associated hospitalisations in children," she said.

"Supporting parents of children with symptomatic infection to keep them home from school or childcare when ill, increasing immunization rates for seasonal influenza and reducing air pollution could also considerably reduce the burden."

Study co-senior author MCRI Professor David Burgner said the findings also suggested that COVID-19 infection control measures, especially when respiratory illnesses were at their peak, could have a huge impact on many respiratory conditions in younger children.

Emergency departments across Victoria have experienced a rise in children presenting with respiratory conditions including [respiratory syncytial virus](#), pneumonia and bronchiolitis over recent months.

"A number of factors could be contributing to the jump in cases, such as the easing of physical distancing and public gathering restrictions, as well as the potential waning of herd immunity due to children not being as exposed to respiratory infections in the community during lockdowns last year," he said.

Study co-senior author Doherty Institute Senior Epidemiologist Associate Professor Sheena Sullivan said "evidence that has emerged since this study was done indicated that some viruses have since rebounded with the lifting of restrictions. Of note, respiratory syncytial virus circulation rebounded during the summer. It is unclear what this might mean for other common respiratory viruses, such as influenza."

More information: Changes in infection-related hospitalisations in children following pandemic restrictions: an interrupted time-series

analysis of total population data, *International Journal of Epidemiology*.
[DOI: 10.1093/ije/dyab101](https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyab101)

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