U.S. hospitals seeing record numbers of young COVID patients

January 4 2022, by Robin Foster

(HealthDay)—COVID-19 hospitalizations among children are surging

across the United States just as students return to school and the highly transmissible Omicron variant begins to dominate the country.

At least nine states have reported record numbers of COVID-related pediatric hospitalizations: They include Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, Ohio and Pennsylvania, as well as Washington, D.C., *NBC News* reported.

At Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, pediatric hospitalization numbers have surpassed the peak seen during the [Delta](#) surge last summer, Dr. Jim Versalovic, co-leader of the hospital's COVID-19 Command Center, said during a Monday news briefing, *NBC News* reported.

"We have staggering numbers here from this Omicron surge already," Versalovic said during the briefing, *CNN* reported. "We shattered prior records that were established during the Delta surge in August."

Ninety percent of the hospital's cases were shown through sequencing to have been caused by the Omicron variant.

In more troubling news on Monday, the American Academy of Pediatrics [reported](#) a stunning rise in pediatric COVID cases.

"COVID-19 cases among U.S. children have reached the highest case count ever reported since the start of the pandemic," the report said. "For the week ending December 30th, over 325,000 child COVID-19 cases were reported. This number is a 64% increase over the 199,000 added cases reported the week ending December 23rd and an almost doubling of case counts from the two weeks prior."

While serious illness from COVID is still rare for [younger children](#), the sheer number of new cases worries doctors.

"It seems like people have tried to downplay the significance of the disease in children," said Dr. Mark Kline, the physician-in-chief at Children's Hospital New Orleans. "We've spent two years rebutting myths pertaining to COVID and children, that it's 'harmless' for children. It's not."

As of Monday, 14 children were sick enough with COVID-19 to be hospitalized at Kline's facility, with three in intensive care. The three children are under the age of 2. The youngest is just 8 weeks old, Kline said.

Kline co-authored a [study](#), published last week by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that analyzed 915 COVID cases among children and teenagers hospitalized at six medical centers in July and August.

More than three-quarters—78 percent—were hospitalized because of COVID complications. About half needed help breathing, and nearly a third were placed in intensive care. A third of the 915 patients had no underlying health problems that would have put them at greater risk for severe COVID infection.

"I think a lot of parents have been relying on the narrative that if you have a healthy child, it's very unlikely that your child can get sick from COVID. That's not true," s Dr. Amy Edwards, a pediatric infectious disease expert at University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Cleveland, told *NBC News*.

"It is true that statistically speaking, your kid probably won't have severe COVID, but statistics don't matter when it's your child who ends up getting sick," she noted.

Edwards added she and her colleagues have seen a "significant uptick" in

the number of children admitted to the hospital recently with COVID-19, as well as an increase in the number of children needing IV fluids, oxygen support and, in some cases, ventilation.

Doctors say the vast majority of children hospitalized with COVID-19 are unvaccinated, because they are too young to be eligible or their parents declined to get them immunized.

Kline conducted his research during the Delta surge last summer. Although early research is suggesting that the Omicron variant may result in milder illness overall, Kline said the sheer number of Omicron cases will still lead to more hospitalizations.

"It's a bit of wishful thinking to say, 'Well, it's mild,' or 'It's going to be OK,' but if there are 10 times as many cases, that still equates with a lot of hospitalizations and a lot of ICU admissions and, unfortunately, deaths," he said.

Kline is not the only pediatric infectious disease doctor who is worried about climbing COVID hospitalizations among children.

"I have never seen an infection sweep an entire country in a matter of a week or two," Dr. David Kimberlin, a co-director of the division of pediatric infectious diseases at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, told *NBC News.* "The rate of cases in my portion of Alabama is like a rocket ship. It reflects how much virus is out there in the community. With that, we're going to see increasing hospitalization numbers."

Dr. Chethan Sathya, a pediatric surgeon at Cohen Children's Medical Center in New York, part of Northwell Health, said that "literally every child" he and his team operated on or treated otherwise over the last weekend was COVID-positive. Even if their illnesses weren't specific to

the coronavirus, they stretched resources nevertheless.

Dr. Edith Bracho-Sanchez, a primary care pediatrician at Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City, has seen the same.

"We are seeing more COVID now than we have seen in previous waves," she told *CNN*. "And it's worrisome that the worst of the winter here has not passed, and we are bracing for what is still to come."

More information: Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on [kids and COVID vaccines.](#)

Valentine Wanga et al, Characteristics and Clinical Outcomes of Children and Adolescents Aged

Citation: U.S. hospitals seeing record numbers of young COVID patients (2022, January 4) retrieved 4 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-hospitals-young-covid-patients.html