

Uptake of childhood immunizations increased during Scotland's national lockdown in 2020

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In March 2020, the United Kingdom instituted a national lockdown, mandating that people only leave their home for a limited number of

reasons. These public health measures led to significant changes in healthcare-seeking behavior. A study publishing February 22 in *PLOS Medicine* by Fiona McQuaid at University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, and colleagues suggests the national lockdown in Scotland was associated with an increase in the uptake of childhood immunizations.

COVID-19-related national lockdowns disrupted many aspects of life, including key routine health services. However, the impact on childhood [immunization rates](#) is unclear. To better understand how national lockdowns impacted childhood vaccine rates, researchers conducted an [observational study](#) using routinely collected data from 439,754 invitations to receive five [childhood vaccinations](#) in Scotland. The vaccinations included three doses of "6 in 1" Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Hemophilus influenzae type b and Hepatitis B vaccine, and two doses of Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine. The researchers then compared immunization rates in 2019 to the periods immediately before, during, and after the first COVID-19 public health restrictions in the United Kingdom.

The researchers found that uptake in Scotland within four weeks of eligibility for all five vaccines was higher during lockdown than in 2019. However, further studies are needed to determine the factors contributing to this observed increase in immunizations, as well as how to continue to improve uptake of infant and pre-school immunizations beyond the pandemic.

According to the authors, "We have demonstrated that a robust child immunization service can continue to deliver high and even increasing uptake rates. Families will respond despite the many difficulties they face, to ensure that children continue to be protected against vaccine-preventable diseases. The challenge now is to use and expand on this knowledge to promote future vaccination programs, including those targeting SARS-CoV-2. These findings suggest that, despite early

concerns, infant and preschool immunization uptake increased in Scotland over the lockdown period."

McQuaid adds, "During the first COVID19 lockdown in Scotland, the uptake rates of routine childhood immunizations (such as the MMR) increased compared to the previous year."

More information: McQuaid F, Mulholland R, Sangpang Rai Y, Agrawal U, Bedford H, Cameron JC, et al. (2022) Uptake of infant and preschool immunisations in Scotland and England during the COVID-19 pandemic: An observational study of routinely collected data. *PLoS Med* 19(2): e1003916. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003916

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