

New data illustrate COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted infection preventionists' mental and physical health

July 14 2022



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Findings from a first-of-its-kind study published today in the *American Journal of Infection Control (AJIC)* suggest that infection preventionists

experienced worsening mental and physical health as a result of stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, which evaluated infection preventionists' health, well-being and their association with workplace wellness programs, highlights a need to fix hospital and healthcare facilities' system issues that cause burnout and poor health, and to enhance workplace wellness programs and culture.

Infection preventionists are responsible for reducing the risk of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) in hospitals and other [health facilities](#), including long-term care and outpatient surgery centers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these [professionals](#) have had to manage rapidly changing guidance, dramatic increases in HAIs and workload, and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and staff, among other challenges.

"Infection preventionists have been actively engaged in managing the COVID-19 pandemic for more than two years, yet there hasn't been a study evaluating their [health](#) and well-being and how these are associated with workplace wellness programs and culture," said Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Ph.D., chief wellness officer and College of Nursing dean at The Ohio State University and lead author on the study. "This is important information because [poor health](#) and well-being among infection prevention professionals not only adversely impacts them, but also negatively impacts the quality and safety of healthcare."

Dr. Melnyk and colleagues developed a [survey](#) exploring infection preventionists' mental/[physical health](#) and lifestyle behaviors during the pandemic, and the associations of these factors with individuals' professional roles, perceived workplace wellness support, shift length and race/ethnicity. The survey was emailed to a random sample of members of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), the leading organization for infection preventionists.

Responses from 926 professionals show that infection preventionists' physical and [mental health](#) were negatively impacted during the pandemic, and that individuals' professional roles, the level of wellness support they received in the workplace and shift lengths were primary factors. Specific findings include:

- High numbers of respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected their mental (74%) and/or physical (60%) health.
- Rates of depression, anxiety and burnout among survey respondents were 21.5%, 29.8% and 65.2%, respectively.
- Most respondents said the pandemic negatively impacted their sleep (77%), [physical activity](#) (64.5%) and healthy eating (61.1%).
- Front-line practitioners (74.1%) and infection prevention administrators/directors (76.3%) had more negative mental health impacts than peers in other roles (e.g., educator, researcher, public health practitioner).
- Infection preventionists working 9-11+ hours per day were more likely to report worsening physical/mental health during the pandemic as compared to their peers who worked

Citation: New data illustrate COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted infection preventionists' mental and physical health (2022, July 14) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-07-covid-pandemic-negatively-impacted-infection.html>

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