

Pilot program in California shows dogs able to accurately sniff out COVID-19

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A team of medical researchers from the California Department of Public Health, Kaiser Permanente, and Early Alert Canines, has conducted a pilot program to look into the possibility of using dogs to sniff out

COVID-19 infections in students. In their paper published in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*, the group describes their testing setup using trained dogs in both public and private schools and what they learned from the experience.

During the early days of the pandemic, some reports were made by various sources that dogs were able to tell which people were infected with the virus using only their noses. Subsequent studies found that such reports held merit—many [dog breeds](#) have been found capable of detecting [volatile organic compounds](#) emitted by infected people.

In this new effort, the research team wondered if using dogs to assist with testing students could reduce the amount of medical waste resulting from antigen tests. They also noted how students disliked being tested due to how uncomfortable they were—also there was the issue of missed class time. To find out if dogs might help, the team contacted Early Alert Canines—a company that trains dogs to sniff out a host of medical ailments in people. Together the team set up a testing scenario that would work for both the dogs and the students.

Testing was done by asking students to line up approximately six feet apart. Each was then asked to turn around before a dog walked the line sniffing ankles. If COVID-19 was detected, the dog was trained to sit down for a moment behind the student. The students were asked to turn away from the dogs so that they would not know who, if anyone, was found to be infected, protecting privacy. Two dogs were used in the study, both yellow Labradors.

Over two months in the spring of 2022, the dogs were taken to 27 schools in California where they sniffed 1,558 volunteer students. Testing was also done with antigen tests and in so doing, the team was able to see that the dogs were approximately 90% accurate in sniffing out infections while also ruling out those not infected. The dogs detected

383 infections and missed 18.

The researchers conclude by suggesting their [pilot program](#) shows that using dogs is an effective mechanism for conducting a large-scale, inexpensive testing regimen. They note also that using dogs for testing results in less discomfort for the students and less missed schooltime.

More information: Carol A. Glaser et al, Lessons Learned From a COVID-19 Dog Screening Pilot in California K-12 Schools, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.0489](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.0489)

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