

Study finds no increase in preventable illnesses, deaths in kids during pandemic, but delays in some diagnoses

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Despite major disruptions to health care systems during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no significant increase in preventable conditions or

deaths in children according to a large study [published](#) in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*.

To understand the effect of the pandemic on pediatric health care use and [children's health](#), researchers looked at data on emergency visits, hospital admissions and deaths for children aged 0–17 years in Ontario, Canada's largest province. They compared prepandemic data (January 2017 to February 2020) with trends in the first 2.5 years of the pandemic (March 2020 to August 2022).

Rates of emergency department visits, hospital admissions and stays in intensive care units were lower during the pandemic, especially in the early stages. However, there were delays in new diagnoses of cancer and diabetes, and children with diabetes presented more frequently with diabetic ketoacidosis, a serious condition.

During the spring and summer of 2022, there were more [hospital admissions](#) for pneumonia and asthma, most probably because of a longer flu and respiratory syncytial virus season as well as lifting of pandemic restrictions.

The authors urge education campaigns for parents and caregivers about important signs and symptoms of health conditions in children who may need [medical care](#) in future pandemics.

"While ongoing pandemic-related challenges, such as surgical wait times, for pediatric care persist, our analyses suggest that most urgent medical care needs of children were met despite the disruptions to the [health care system](#)," said author Dr. Astrid Guttmann, senior scientist at ICES and a pediatrician and senior scientist at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids), Toronto, Ontario. "However, future system disruptions should include public messaging about symptoms that require urgent attention."

More information: Acute health care use among children during the first 2.5 years of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, Canada: a population-based repeated cross-sectional study, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.22172](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.22172).
www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.221726

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