

Study shows first responders at higher risk of COVID-19 infection

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Data from an ongoing research study at the University of Arizona Health Sciences show that first responders—including firefighters, law enforcement, correctional officers and emergency medical service providers—are at elevated risk of COVID-19 infection compared with other essential workers and frontline health care personnel.

The paper, "Incidence of SARS-CoV-2 Infection Among Health Care Personnel, First Responders, and Other Essential Workers During a Pre-vaccination COVID-19 Surge in Arizona," was published today in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Health Forum*.

The findings are based on data from the Arizona Healthcare, Emergency Response, and Other Essential Workers Surveillance (AZ HEROES) research study at the UArizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health. Researchers say the findings show the need to increase vaccination rates for first responders and maintain mitigation measures to protect these important professionals.

"This analysis of the AZ HEROES study data

shows that we need to do more to help protect our first responders, their families and the communities they serve," said Kate Ellingson, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the Zuckerman College of Public Health who has been a researcher on the AZ HEROES study since it was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in spring 2020. "Specifically, we need to better understand the risk factors driving infection among first responders and to tailor mitigation strategies accordingly, including vaccine promotion."

Researchers from UArizona Health Sciences, the CDC, the Arizona Department of Health Services and Marshfield Laboratories collaborated to analyze the weekly COVID-19 test results of 1,766 [health care personnel](#), first responders and other essential workers, data that was gathered from July 2020 through March 2021. First responders had twice the incidence of COVID-19 infection as frontline health care workers—13.2% vs. 6.7% – with the incidence in other essential workers similar to that of [health](#) care workers.

The analysis of the AZ HEROES data from an occupation perspective gives us a new understanding," said Jefferey L. Burgess, MD, MS, MPH, principal investigator for the AZ HEROES study and professor at the Zuckerman College of Public Health. "Our [first responders](#) are so important, and these data show that we need to do more to keep them safe."

More information: Katherine D. Ellingson et al, Incidence of SARS-CoV-2 Infection Among Health Care Personnel, First Responders, and Other Essential Workers During a Pre-vaccination COVID-19 Surge in Arizona, *JAMA Health Forum* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jamahealthforum.2021.3318](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamahealthforum.2021.3318)

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