Why do we need COVID-19 testing in schools?

As new coronavirus variants emerge globally, public health experts are looking at one key group of individuals who may be vulnerable to future outbreaks – children. The consequences of the pandemic have hit children on multiple fronts, but most would argue school closures and has caused the biggest disruption, turning their daily routine upside down and changing the way they learn. Come fall 2021, schools are picking up where they left off, which means kids will return to in-person learning, however variants of concern (VOCs) may end up changing this plan if infections break out in school sites. While vaccinations continue to put the worst of the pandemic behind us, variants question vaccine efficacy and whether in-person learning will be affected going forward.

There has been a lot of buzz about coronavirus infections and breakouts due to the Delta variant, but what is the Delta variant and how does it affect children? A variant is just a different version of an already existent virus. As a virus is replicated, some copies contain variations from the original version. These differences result in the virus spreading easier and/or faster, creating more severe symptoms, or lengthen the time of infection. A prime example of this occurring is with the Delta variant, first identified in India, which spreads up to 50% faster compared to other variants and now accounts for 83% of all sequenced COVID cases in U.S. [1].

98% of cases identified at the Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) between November 2020 and April 2021 being the B.1.429/B.1.427 "California" variant – News-Medical.Net [2]

With new variants on the rise coupled with a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated groups returning back to schools, outbreaks among younger students may be inevitable. In the United States, children under 12 are currently excluded from vaccination programs and only approximately 25% of children ages 12-15 and 37% of children ages 16-17 are fully vaccinated, making them the age group with the lowest vaccination rate [3]. This low vaccination rate and congregation of kids and adult staff in school settings puts those who are unvaccinated at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. The risk extends further as mandates, such as wearing masks and social distancing are eliminated.

There are multiple strategies put in place to help limit the risk of COVID-19 spreading within schools and the community, including masking, social distancing, temperature taking. Although data shows these mitigation efforts lowers the risk of viral spread, the goal should be minimizing the spread of the virus in the school community. The most effective way to do this is identifying infected individuals through testing for COVID-19 and keep them away from schools and children.

Comprehensive K-12 coronavirus testing can be quickly implemented in schools and supported by government funds. With pooled sampling to keep costs more efficient, swabbing done quickly by students themselves, and prepaid return shipping to the testing facility, this program is designed to make in-school coronavirus testing an easy reality for students, educators and parents alike. To learn more about how to implement a coronavirus testing program, click here.

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Sources

[1] https://www.cnbc.com/2021/07/20/delta-variant-now-accounts-for-83percent-of-all-sequenced-covid-cases-in-the-us-cdc-director-walensky-says.html

[2] https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210526/New-SARS-CoV-2-variants-emerge-among-children-in-United-States-suggests-study.aspx

[3] https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-updates-07-14-21/h_35fc0c49eba9a78863e64f90c5eae2cb