

Study Overview

In July 2020, a multidisciplinary team from Case Western Reserve University launched the Ohio COVID-19 Child Care Study to better understand how to lower the spread and lessen the impact of COVID-19 among staff and families affiliated with child care programs in the state. The team, with expertise in child health and wellbeing, environmental health, epidemiology, and infectious disease management and control, designed the rapid-response study that included (A) statewide examination of COVID-19 cases among child care staff and children attending child care and (B) in-depth analysis in 10 counties including data collection using the following methods:

- Weekly Health Attestations for Staff, Parents and Caregivers
- Surveys with Parents and Caregivers
- One-on-One Interviews with Staff, Parents and Caregivers
- Focus Groups with Child Care Program Administrators and Staff
- Asymptomatic COVID-19 Testing for Staff, Parents and Caregivers

Study Timeline & Participants

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Incident Reporting Data were analyzed for all 88 Ohio counties from the start of the pandemic to November 13, 2020. In-depth data within 10 counties were collected during a snapshot in time from August 15 – November 20, 2020 from 470 participants affiliated with 46 child care programs located in the following counties: Ashtabula (n=2 programs), Butler (n=2), Cuyahoga (n=6), Franklin (n=8), Hamilton (n=5), Licking (n=2), Lucas (n=3), Montgomery (n=7), Stark (n=4), and Summit (n=7) counties.

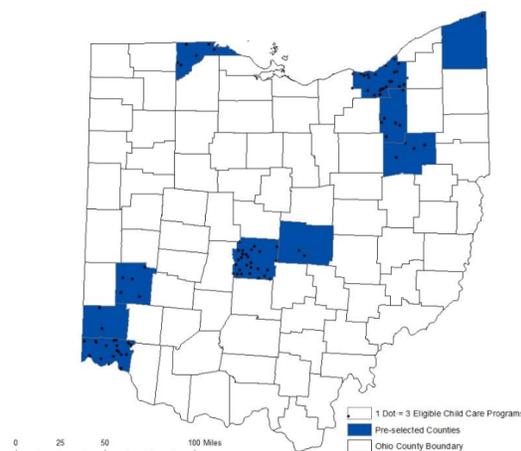
Research Questions

- What are the trends in COVID-19 transmission among child care programs operating in diverse contexts in Ohio?
- What factors drive or limit the spread of COVID-19 in child care settings in diverse contexts in Ohio?
- What are the perceptions of risk and safety among parents and caregivers and staff from child care programs in Ohio following their reopening after COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency?
- What are the levels of child and caregiver stress and coping in response to COVID-19?

Methods

The study team analyzed statewide Serious Incident Reporting data submitted by child care programs to ODJFS to examine trends in COVID-19 cases among child care staff and children. Within the selected 10 counties, the study engaged child care program administrators, staff, parents and caregivers to better understand approaches to mitigate COVID-19 transmission and overall experiences with child care during a phase of the pandemic when COVID-19 transmission rates were relatively low.

In-depth Analysis of COVID-19 in Child Care Settings (10 counties)



Ten selected counties had variability in COVID-19 severity, number of child care programs, geographic location, and socio-demographics. These counties have two-thirds of all licensed child care programs in Ohio.

OHIO COVID-19 CHILD CARE STUDY BY THE NUMBERS

88

COUNTIES WITH COVID-19 CASE REPORTING

10

COUNTIES WITH IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

46

ENROLLED PROGRAMS

228

ENROLLED CHILD CARE STAFF

242

ENROLLED PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Key Findings

- Compliance with COVID-19 mitigation strategies is keeping child care workers and children safe.
- Prevalence of COVID-19 in child care programs in Ohio was low.
- COVID-19 cases in child care are higher among staff than children.
- Community transmission of COVID-19 influences transmission risk within child care settings.
- Child care workers provide critical infrastructure for Ohio's economy.
- Additional support is needed for elementary-aged children doing remote learning in child care.

A Snapshot in Time

- During most of the study timeframe, COVID-19 positivity rates in Ohio were below the 5% threshold set by the World Health Organization to determine low risk of community transmission.
- Based on statewide incident reporting data from child care programs, child care affiliated COVID-19 cases represented less than 1% of the cumulative COVID-19 cases in Ohio from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 to November 13, 2020.
- These trends corroborate a national study that found transmission of COVID-19 to workers within child care settings was rare during periods of low community transmission of COVID-19. This low transmission rate is attributed to high compliance with COVID-19 mitigation protocols by both child care workers and families with children attending child care.
- This public health success was also supported by clear and comprehensive state guidelines for mitigating COVID-19 transmission within child care settings and provision of grants to maintain lower classroom ratios and implement rigorous sanitation and hygiene protocols in child care programs.

THE ESSENTIAL WORKERS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Findings revealed child care staff enable parents and caregivers to remain in the workforce while providing opportunities for children to thrive.

When parents and caregivers were asked 'What would happen if your child care program closed due to COVID-19 transmission?'

74%

reported someone in their household would need to reduce work hours

54%

stated it would result in loss of income for the household

Challenges and Opportunities

Findings suggest that child care programs may need assistance over time to fully comply with recommendations for COVID-19 mitigation and manage program operations during the pandemic. Some of the challenges cited by child care administrators and staff included:

- Financing operations with reduced classroom enrollment.
- Securing affordable personal protective equipment and cleaning materials.
- Maintaining workers to safely staff classrooms.
- Providing timely information about COVID-19 to child care workers and families.
- Managing elementary-aged children conducting remote and online learning in child care programs.

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