

Fewer non-COVID-19 respiratory tract infections and gastrointestinal infections during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Respiratory diseases*

Aims

For preventing the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, measures like wearing masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene played crucial roles. These measures may also have affected the expansion of other infectious diseases like respiratory tract infections (RTI) and gastro-intestinal infections (GII). Therefore, we aimed to investigate non-COVID-19 related RTI and GII during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

Patients with a diagnosis of an acute RTI (different locations) or acute GII documented anonymously in 994 general practitioner (GP) or 192 pediatrician practices in Germany were included. We compared the prevalence of acute RTI and GII between April 2019-March 2020 and April 2020-March 2021.

Results

In GP practices, 715,440 patients were diagnosed with RTI or GII in the nonpandemic period versus 468,753 in the pandemic period; the same trend was observed by pediatricians (275,033 vs. 165,127). By GPs, the strongest decrease was observed for the diagnosis of influenza (-71%, $p < 0.001$), followed by acute laryngitis (-64%, $p < 0.001$), acute lower respiratory infections (bronchitis) (-62%, $p < 0.001$), and intestinal infections (-40%, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the relatively rare viral pneumonia strongly increased by 229% ($p < 0.001$). In pediatrician practices, there was a strong decrease in infection diagnoses, especially influenza (-90%, $p < 0.001$), pneumonia (-73%, $p < 0.001$ viral; -76%, $p <$

0.001 other pneumonias), and acute sinusitis (-66%, $p < 0.001$). No increase was observed for viral pneumonia in children.

Conclusion

The considerable limitations concerning social life implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to combat the spread of SARS-CoV-2 also resulted in an inadvertent but welcome reduction in other non-Covid-19 respiratory tract and gastro-intestinal infections.

Quelle: Tanislav C, Kostev K. Fewer non-COVID-19 respiratory tract infections and gastrointestinal infections during the COVID-19 pandemic. J Med Virol. 2021 Sep 7. doi: 10.1002/jmv.27321



If you would like to read any of the studies in its entirety, please, contact us to obtain the full version of a publication. Also, our research director is at your disposal if you have any further questions. Thank you for your interest!

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