COVID-19 Rates Increased Where In-Person College Classes Were Held

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) incidence increased by 56% in counties where colleges held in-person classes after the start of last fall’s school year, the CDC reported. As COVID-19 incidence generally declined in US counties in early August 2020, incidence rates increased among young adults aged 18 to 22 years. Such increases have been identified as a driving force of infection among adults older than 60 years, who are at increased risk of severe illness and death. To determine whether large universities’ instructional format—in-person or remote classes—was associated with COVID-19 incidence in the surrounding communities, CDC investigators analyzed data from 101 counties where classes started between July 27 and August 28, 2020.

The data showed that COVID-19 incidence decreased by 6% late last summer and early fall in counties without a large university. In counties where large colleges or universities conducted classes remotely, incidence declined by 17.9%, from 18 to 15 cases per 100,000 population during the period ranging from 3 weeks before classes started to 3 weeks afterward. In counties where universities resumed in-person instruction, incidence climbed from about 15 to 24 cases per 100,000 during the same period.

In addition, mean daily COVID-19 testing increased by 4% in counties with remote classes and by 14% in counties where students attended classes in person. However, testing decreased by 1% in nonuniversity communities. On average, the test positivity rate decreased by nearly 2% in counties with remote instruction and by 0.6% in nonuniversity communities, but the rate increased by 1% in counties with in-person classes.

“College and university administrators should work with local decision-makers and public health officials to strengthen community mitigation,” the authors wrote.

Drug-Resistant Yeast Infections Spread in COVID-19 Unit

Pandemic-related lapses in infection control practices may have caused an outbreak of multidrug-resistant *Candida auris* yeast infections in a Florida hospital’s coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) unit, investigators from the CDC and the Florida Department of Health reported.

A growing public health threat in the US, *C. auris* can cause life-threatening and difficult-to-treat infections in hospitalized patients. Florida has tracked *C. auris* cases since 2017 to limit their spread. After the state’s health department received reports last July about 3 cases in a hospital’s dedicated COVID-19 unit, additional screening found that 52% of 67 COVID-19 patients in the unit were colonized with the yeast.

A joint CDC-Florida Department of Health investigation found that health care workers in the unit wore 2 layers of gowns and gloves during COVID-19 patient care, which the CDC does not recommend. Their base layer—including eye protection, a cloth gown, N95 respirator, gloves, a bouffant cap, and shoe covers—stayed on during their entire shift. They donned a second disposable gown and gloves before entering each patient room and then doffed them on exit. Health care workers cleaned their base-layer gloves with alcohol-based hand sanitizer during doffing and washed their hands when they left the unit.

Investigators observed that the base layers may have been contaminated during donning and doffing, while using shared mobile computers that weren’t always disinfected between users, or when accessing medical supplies in open bins kept in hallways. After the hospital removed supplies from the hallways, enhanced cleaning and disinfection of shared equipment, and ended double layers of personal protective equipment, personnel detected no further *C. auris* cases.

The authors recommended that health care workers maintain standard infection control practices, including hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces while caring for COVID-19 patients. — Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.