**COMMENT & RESPONSE**

**Did We Forget That Masks, Lockdowns, and Other Nonpharmaceutical Interventions Also Play a Role in Respiratory Viral Disease?**

*To the Editor* Encinosa et al.\(^1\) compared outcomes in children with COVID-19 and children with influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in a cross-sectional study. The study found that the hospitalization rate with COVID-19, including multisystem inflammatory syndrome, was 10.8 per 100,000 children, whereas the rates with influenza and RSV were 17 per 100,000 children and 6.2 per 100,000 children, respectively. The results indicated that COVID-19 infection among children might not be as severe as influenza. However, one limitation of this study must be emphasized.

Soon after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, preventive measures such as wearing masks, social distancing, and lockdowns were quickly implemented. Previous studies found that wearing a mask can effectively reduce the risk of respiratory viral infection, including COVID-19.\(^2,3\) Other nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), such as public gathering restrictions and school closures, also played important roles in controlling the pandemic, and the implementation of NPIs in the first wave of COVID-19 impacted people’s knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors.\(^4\) It was also noted that the positive rate of influenza testing decreased considerably and has remained at historically low levels following the adoption of community mitigation measures to control COVID-19.\(^5\) In this study,\(^1\) the COVID-19 hospitalization data were gathered during the first quarter of 2021, while the influenza and RSV hospitalization data were from the first quarter of 2017. However, Encinosa et al.\(^1\) did not emphasize potential confounding factors, such as NPIs, that could have effectively reduced COVID-19 infection. Instead, the data of COVID-19 hospitalization when NPIs were widely enforced were compared with data of influenza and RSV when NPIs were not in place.

Encinosa et al.\(^1\) did mention that influenza and RSV were rare during the first quarter of 2021. When NPIs were widely used, hospitalization with COVID-19 was more prevalent than hospitalization with influenza and RSV. We recommend the authors address this limitation to avoid sending false information to the public that COVID-19 may be less severe than influenza among children.

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