Epidemiology of SARS-CoV-2 infection and SARS-CoV-2 positive hospital admissions among children in South Africa

Tendesayi Kufa1, Waasila Jassat1, Cheryl Cohen1, Stefano Tempia1, Maureen Masha1, Nicole Wolter1, Sibongile Walaza1, Anne von Gottberg1, Nelesh Govender1, Gillian Hunt1, Andronica Shonhiwa1, Joy Ebonwu1, Genevie M. Ntshoe1, Wellington Maruma1, Poncho Bapela1, Nomathamsanqa Ndlovu1, Hlengani Mathema1, Motshabi Modise1, Liliwe Shuping1, Pinky Manana1, David Moore2, Ziyaad Dangoor2, Charl Verwey2, Shabir Madhi2, Haroon Saloojee2, Heather J. Zar3, and Lucille Blumberg1

1National Institute for Communicable Diseases
2University of the Witwatersrand Faculty of Health Sciences
3University of Cape Town Faculty of Health Sciences

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Abstract

Introduction: We describe epidemiology and outcomes of confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection and admissions among children <18 years in South Africa, an upper-middle income setting with high inequality. Methods: Laboratory and hospital COVID-19 surveillance data, 28 January - 19 September 2020 was used. Testing rates were calculated as number of tested for SARS-CoV-2 divided by population at risk; test positivity rates were calculated as positive tests divided by total number of tests. In-hospital case fatality ratio (CFR) was calculated based on hospitalized positive admissions with outcome data who died in-hospital and death was judged SARS-CoV-2 related by attending physician. Findings: 315,570 children aged <18 years were tested for SARS-CoV-2; representing 8.9% of all 3,548,738 tests and 1.6% of all children in the country. Of children tested, 46,137 (14.6%) were positive. Children made up 2.9% (n=2,007) of all SARS-CoV-2 positive admissions to sentinel hospitals. Among children, 47 died (2.6% case-fatality). In-hospital deaths were associated with male sex [adjusted odds ratio (aOR) 2.18 (95% confidence intervals (CI) 1.08 - 4.40)] vs female; age <1 year [aOR 4.11 (95% CI 1.08-15.54)], age 10-14 years [aOR 4.20 (95% CI1.07-16.44)], age 15-17 years [aOR 4.86 (95% 1.28 -18.51)] vs age 1-4 years; admission to a public hospital [aOR 5.07(95% CI 2.01 -12.76)] vs private hospital and [?]1 underlying conditions [aOR 12.09 (95% CI 4.19-34.89)] vs none Conclusions: Children with underlying conditions were at greater risk of severe SARS-CoV-2 outcomes. Children > 10 years and those with underlying conditions should be considered for increased testing and vaccination.

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