

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RAEB'S Evidence Update

Highlights of health research synthesized by the Research, Analysis and Evaluation Branch

July 20, 2020

Featured

[RAEB'S Rapid Responses for Ontario's Health Sector](#)

[Research Evidence](#)

[Jurisdictional Experience](#)

[Trusted Resources](#)

RAEB's Rapid Responses for Ontario's Health Sector

Please contact the [Evidence Synthesis Unit](#) for the full read of these rapid responses.

Approaches to mitigating the risk of COVID-19 in workplace settings with children where physical distancing cannot be maintained

While physical distancing is important to preventing the spread of COVID-19, certain workplaces experience difficulty maintaining distance, as physical interaction is required and/or inevitable to carry out job functions. To address this difficulty, personal protective equipment (PPE) has been recommended or implemented in workplaces where physical distancing cannot be maintained pertaining to:

School Settings: Canada, China, France, Germany South Korea, UK, US, and Vietnam highlight three circumstances where PPE would be required:

Where physical distancing (i.e., two meters) is not maintained: Ontario (masks, goggles, face shields, gloves), Alberta (masks), Newfoundland and Labrador (masks, face shields), Centers for Disease, Control and Prevention (US) (masks), Texas (facial coverings, face shields), and Vermont (facial coverings) recommend the use of PPE if a two-metre distance is not maintained between staff and students.

Close contact with a symptomatic student: British Columbia (masks, gloves), Quebec (masks, face shields, gowns, gloves), and Saskatchewan (masks, eye protection) recommend the use of PPE if staff are in contact with a symptomatic student.

Mandatory at all times: Northwest Territories (Canada) (masks), China (masks, thermal scanner), France (masks, visor caps), Bavaria (Germany) (masks), South Korea (masks), and Vietnam (masks) recommend staff and students wear PPE at all times, with the medical and various exceptions (e.g., eating, age).

Daycare and Child Care Centres: Canada identified PPE recommendations specific to daycare and child care centres. In particular, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and Nova Scotia recommend the use of masks in cases where staff encounter children exhibiting signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.

School and Child Care Settings: The UK recommends PPE use applicable to schools and child care settings. For example, when interacting with a child who is symptomatic, staff are recommended to wear a face mask, eye protection, and apron and gloves.

Research Evidence

The research evidence profiled below was selected from highly esteemed academic journals, based on date of publication and potential applicability or interest to the Ontario health sector.

Association between universal masking and SARS-COV-2 positivity among health care workers

July 14, 2020. A study in Massachusetts across 12 hospitals found that 12.9% of health care workers tested positive for COVID-19, and that universal masking led to a significantly lower rate of COVID-19 positivity among health care workers (i.e., weighted mean decline of 0.49% in positivity rate per day). [Article.](#)

Obesity, walking pace, and risk of severe COVID-19: Analysis of UK biobank

July 11, 2020. An analysis of 414,201 UK Biobank participants suggested that the risk of severe, hospitalizing COVID-19 is highest for slow walkers, regardless of obesity status. Compared to those with a brisk walking pace, the odds ratio of severe COVID-19 in steady/average and slow walkers was 1.15 and 1.84, respectively. Self-reported walking pace appears to be a risk factor for severe COVID-19 that is independent of obesity. [Article.](#)

Convalescent plasma or hyperimmune immunoglobulin for people with COVID-19: A living systematic review

July 10, 2020. This systematic review noted that it is uncertain whether plasma from people who have recovered from COVID-19 is an effective treatment for COVID-19. The review found 98 ongoing studies evaluating convalescent plasma and hyperimmune immunoglobulin, of which 50 are randomized. This living review will continue to be updated as additional studies are conducted. [Article.](#)

Effectiveness of cloth masks for protection against COVID-19

July 8, 2020. A US study suggested that until cloth masks are proven to be equally effective as medical or N95 masks, wearing them should not be mandated for health care workers. In community settings, cloth masks may be used to prevent community spread of infections by sick or asymptotically infected persons, and the public should be educated about their correct use. [Article.](#)

Pre-existing immunity to SARS-CoV-2 and the common cold

July 7, 2020. Researchers suggested that, to some degree, there is pre-existing immune reactivity to SARS-CoV-2 in the general population, possibly due to exposure to ‘common cold’ coronaviruses. [Article.](#)

Jurisdictional Experience

Seroprevalence of COVID-19 in British Columbia

July 15, 2020. According to a seroprevalence survey study (preprint) conducted in British Columbia, less than 1% of the province was infected with COVID-19 when first-wave mitigation measures were relaxed in May 2020, indicating successful suppression of community transmission. [Article.](#)

Absence of apparent SARS-CoV-2 transmission from hair salon with a universal face covering policy

July 14, 2020. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report indicated that a hair salon in the US which implemented universal masking for all stylists and clients (i.e., 139 clients) and had two laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 among hairstylists, did not report

symptomatic secondary cases. There were 67 clients who agreed to be tested and reported negative results, suggesting that broader implementation of face covering policies could mitigate the spread of infection in the general population. [Article.](#)

Database of international public health guidance on COVID-19

July 14, 2020. A Health Information and Quality Authority Excel database in Ireland includes updated links to international guidance on all aspects of COVID-19 (e.g., contact tracing, infection prevention and control, surveillance). [Article.](#)

Preparing for a challenging winter 2020/2021

July 14, 2020. An Academy of Medical Sciences report in the UK suggested that urgent preparation for COVID-19 is needed to mitigate the potential risks of the winter, which includes: 1) minimizing community SARS-CoV-2 transmission and impact; 2) organizing health and social care settings to ensure that COVID-19 and routine care can take place in parallel; 3) improving public health surveillance for COVID-19, and other winter diseases; and, 4) minimizing influenza transmission and impact. [Article.](#)

Enhancing patient engagement during virtual care during COVID-19

July 10, 2020. A Stanford Healthcare commentary in the US shares the lessons learned during its rapid deployment of virtual visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Article.](#)

COVID-19 pandemic speeds largest test yet of universal basic income in Spain

July 10, 2020. On June 15, 2020, spurred by the COVID-19 crisis and its economic fallout, Spain's government launched a website offering monthly payments of up to USD \$1,145 to the nation's poorest families. The program, which will support 850,000 households, is the largest test yet of universal basic income, in which people are given a cash payment each month to spend however they choose. [Article.](#)

Australia's first COVID-19 treatment approved

July 10, 2020. The Therapeutic Goods Administration in Australia has granted provisional approval to remdesivir for use in adult and adolescent patients with severe COVID-19 symptoms who have been hospitalized. This follows recent approvals in the European Union, Japan, and Singapore. [Article.](#)

COVID-19 lessons learned from Vietnam

July 9, 2020. Vietnam, with a population of 97 million, has had a total of 369 confirmed cases, no deaths, and no cases of community transmission in the past three months. Analysts from the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security detail their approach: 1) early, aggressive screening, mandatory quarantine, and school closures (by the end of January 2020); and 2) targeted testing (by the end of April, 1,000 people tested for every confirmed case found) and 11,000 community health centres supporting contact tracing. [Article.](#)

Australia government issues guidance on wearing masks in the community

July 9, 2020. A Government of Australia report suggested that the country continues to not recommend wearing masks in the community. However, if someone is in a region where community transmission is occurring and they are having difficulty physically distancing, they should take extra precautions, including wearing a mask. [Article.](#)

TRUSTED RESOURCES

An up-to-date and comprehensive list of sources, organized by type of research evidence, is available on McMaster Health Forum's COVID-19 Evidence Network to support Decision-making (COVID-END) [website.](#)

About RAEB

Through research funding, brokering, translating, and sharing, we promote an enhanced evidence use capacity that supports all aspects of health policy, programming, and investment decision-making. Services include:

- Literature reviews
- Jurisdictional scans
- Economic analysis
- Evaluation planning
- Research fund management
- Knowledge translation services

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