Racial Variations in Parents’ Attitudes About Reopening Schools

Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native parents expressed more concern than White parents about the safety of reopening schools last fall, according to a survey commissioned by the CDC.

President Joe Biden pledged to reopen schools within 100 days of taking office as part of a larger coordinated response to control the pandemic and move the country toward recovery, according to news reports. But achieving that goal will require parents to support safety measures.

Among 858 parents surveyed in July 2020, almost two-thirds of White parents strongly or somewhat agreed that schools should reopen in the fall. In comparison, half of Hispanic parents and 46% of Black parents agreed with that statement. However, White parents were less supportive of a mask mandate for students and staff than other racial and ethnic groups: about 63% of White parents supported a mandate compared with nearly 80% of Hispanic parents, 73% of Black parents, and 70% of parents who identified as Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, or another racial or ethnic group.

Nearly all parents who identified as Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, or another racial group were concerned about students’ compliance with safety measures. About 92% of Black parents shared that concern, along with 85% of White parents and 81% of Hispanic parents. More than 90% of parents who identified as Black, Asian, American Indian, Alaska Native, or another racial group were concerned about their child contracting coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) at school compared with roughly 85% of White or Hispanic parents.

“Understanding parental attitudes and concerns is critical to informing communication and messaging around COVID-19 mitigation,” the authors wrote. “Families’ concerns also highlight the need for flexible education plans and equitable resource provision so that youth education is not compromised,” they added.

Drug-Resistant Bacteria Outbreak Linked to COVID-19 Patient Surge

Breaches in infection control practices during last spring’s coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) surge likely contributed to a 34-patient outbreak of carbapenem-resistant Acinetobacter baumannii (CRAB) infections at a New Jersey hospital.

CRAB infections are a pressing public health concern because the bacteria may linger on hospital surfaces or spread via asymptomatic individuals or on caregivers’ hands. Although many hospitals have CRAB surveillance and strict infection prevention and control practices, the New Jersey hospital changed some of its infection control methods in March 2020 as the proportion of patients with COVID-19 approached 60%.

After the hospital reported the outbreak in May, New Jersey public health authorities found that the surge of COVID-19 patients led to shortages in personnel, personal protective equipment (PPE), and medical equipment. To manage the shortages and minimize clinicians’ infection risk, some infection prevention and control practices were intentionally suspended. For example, instead of routinely replacing ventilator circuits and suctioning catheters at set intervals, hospital staff replaced only the devices that were visibly soiled or malfunctioning. To conserve a supply of gowns, the hospital limited their use to care for patients with certain infections, including CRAB.

Unintentional lapses also occurred. CRAB screening in the intensive care unit fell by 43% and chlorhexidine baths were less frequent. In response to the CRAB outbreak, the hospital enhanced environmental cleaning, reinforced adherence to infection control practices, and reinstated routine audits of the practices. CRAB cases subsequently returned to pre-COVID levels.

“Hospitals managing surges of patients with COVID-19 might be vulnerable to outbreaks of multidrug-resistant organism infections,” the authors wrote. “Maintaining [infection prevention and control] best practices...to the extent possible could mitigate spread.” — Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

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