

COVID-19 and schools: Back to School and CoMMinS



Jeremy Horwood

Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Health
Behavioural and Qualitative Science Team Co-lead
[@JPHorwood](#)



CoMMinS study



- What can the university do to help the city and region's pandemic recovery and resilience?
- Can you help us to keep schools open during the challenging year ahead?
- 'COVID-19 Mapping and Mitigation in Schools (CoMMinS) study'
- £2.7 Million funding from NIHR-UKRI COVID-19 rapid response initiative



CoMMinS Elements



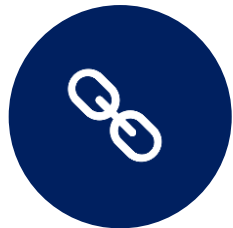
School testing

Understanding infection transmission in children and intervene quickly



Mapping infections

Identify infection hot spots and predict future patterns



Health data linkage

Understand medium to long term health consequences of infection in children



Infection control

Refine Germ Defence for children, practical advice to maximise positive health behaviours



Information systems

Identify digital solutions e.g., school test and trace systems



Students and staff mental wellbeing

Impact of school infection control measures on mental wellbeing

Back to School Study

- Interviews to rapidly investigate secondary school pupil, parent/carer and staff:
 - views on managing Covid-19 infections in schools
 - attitudes towards school Covid-19 infection control measures
 - opinions about student groups who may be particularly affected by measures
 - attitudes towards school based test and trace



- Interviews conducted between July - September 2020
- 15 school staff (Heads/Assistant Heads, teachers, SENCOs) from 7 schools
- 20 families from 10 schools (12 ethnic minority families)
- Rapidly feedback results to local authorities and schools

School COVID-19 risk

- Impact of missing learning outweighed perceived school Covid-19 risk
- Concerns about higher risk staff and students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, due to lack of scientific understanding around the risks

“if you want the kids back at school, you, you have to accept that...there are risks associated with that”
(Georgina, Mum, S3)

“Resigned acceptance [about school opening] that, the world has changed and, um, that we kind of just have to get on with things”
(Anna, SENCO, S1)

School COVID-19 infection control measures

- Schools had to develop own Covid-19 infection control plans due to unclear guidance
- Infection control measures seen as pragmatic solution to the impossibility of social distancing in crowded schools/classes

“maybe they [school] have some magical plan.... I just feel like there’s not enough space for what they’re trying to do”
(Amber, yr 7, S3)

“you can’t properly socially distance in a school so it’s a lot of ‘that’ll do, that’ll do’”
(Matt, Teacher, S3)

Infection control measure concerns

- Concern about infection control measures widening educational inequalities, particularly for those with special educational needs
- Impact on learning and pastoral care e.g. social distancing measures = fewer interactive lessons, and less opportunity to support individual students

"because it's more like lecture style now, so we're not really allowed to walk between the desks or anything - those students are going to miss out, the ones who wouldn't normally put their hand up"

(Finn, Teacher, S5)

Infection control measure facilitators

- Encouraging a 'we culture' of collective responsibility to help students follow school infection control measures, more effective than punishment

“if you want to achieve compliance and cooperation, it's creating an atmosphere that it's in everyone's best interest and you contribute to the common good”
(John, Teacher, S3)

School COVID-19 testing

- School Covid-19 testing welcomed, to reassure about school safety, encourage attendance and reduce the need for school closures
- Stigma related to Covid-19 positivity was thought unlikely
- Some concerns about use and anonymity of information

“...it would make everyone safer than I would do it [regular testing]”
(Jasmine, yr 10, S4)

“I understand the need [to collect data] but, it’s just that personal data being collected about my child makes me feel very uncomfortable”
(Sarah, mum, S4)

Back to School study impact



- Paper published in BMJ Paediatrics Open
- Two rapid reports published online
- Findings:
 - presented to the Department for Education
 - submitted evidence to 2 parliamentary enquiries into the impact of Covid-19 on education
 - disseminated to:
 - SPI-B (SAGE sub committee)
 - Public Health England's Covid-19 Behavioural Science Cell
 - Local authorities and schools in the region

We thank all our participants and the community groups who helped with recruitment.

Study team: Ava Lorenc, Jo Kesten, Judi Kidger, Beki Langford, Jeremy Horwood.

Reference: Lorenc, A. Kesten, J. Kidger, J. L. Langford, R. M. Horwood, J. (2021) [Reducing Covid-19 risk in schools: a qualitative examination of secondary school staff and family views and concerns in the South West of England.](#) *BMJ Paediatrics Open*. doi: 10.1136/bmjpo-2020-000987

Project website: [Back to School project](#)

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