

Salvogene SARS CoV-2 Task Force: Evidence that Delta does not make children more ill than other variants of the coronavirus

KEYNOTE

The Delta variant of coronavirus does not appear to lead to a more severe course of disease in children than earlier forms of the virus, such as the Alpha or Beta variants. This finding emerged from a prospective symptom study conducted in the UK, in which British school-aged children were compared for symptomatic COVID-19 courses over different time periods.

Study results coming in earlier this year had already indicated that the Alpha variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus does not appear to make children more ill than the "wild" form of the virus which first appeared in China. The prospective COVID-19 symptom study, the results of which were published last week, compared two groups of school-aged children with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection: 694 children infected with the Alpha variant between late December 2020 and early May 2021, and 706 children infected with the Delta variant between late May and early July.

Disease profiles (prevalence of symptoms, duration and severity), hospitalization and presence of prolonged (≥ 28 days) illness were assessed. In both groups, half of the children were ill for no longer than five days. Although the Delta variant displayed slightly more symptoms than the Alpha, especially in older children, this was offset by a similar duration of symptoms, whether these were considered individually or for the illness as a whole. Furthermore, very few children in either group required hospitalization, and long periods of illness were rare. The study was, however, limited by the lack of information on differences between the groups that might have influenced the results, such as whether lockdowns were in force and the impact of different seasons on the course taken by the disease.

However, the data suggests that the clinical symptoms of COVID-19 caused by the Delta variant in children are broadly comparable to those of the disease caused by other variants. This also appears to be consistent with data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That is to say, although we are seeing more cases in children, the severity of the disease is not increasing. The reason why more children are contracting COVID-19 is mainly because there are more COVID-19 cases in the population as a whole.

The study contributes quantitative information to the debate on whether there are significant clinical differences in COVID-19 due to the Alpha and Delta variants, and to the discussion on whether it is appropriate or necessary to vaccinate children (especially those in the younger age bracket) against SARS-CoV-2. We will continue to monitor developments here, especially with regard to new approvals for the vaccination of children.

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