



Responding to the Pandemic

PbS Issue Brief 5: Testing Prevalence and Outcomes in 2021

March 2022

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus and its variants continues to dominate public discussions and exacerbate already difficult situations in neighborhoods, schools, places of work and of worship and in homes and institutions. Because of the nature of the virus and the reality of asymptomatic infections, it is impossible to know the exact number of positive cases that occur within these various contexts. Widespread testing, however, has proven to be the most useful tool for shedding light on the prevalence of the virus and the effectiveness of interventions.

In April 2021, the [Performance-based Standards Learning Institute](#) (PbS) began asking pandemic-related questions in its surveys of nearly 150 facility and program participants across the country. The addition of these questions was part of PbS' ongoing efforts to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the operations and daily activities in juvenile out-of-home placements and the quality of life and conditions for staff, the young people and their families. The data is included as part of PbS' continuous improvement program that agencies use to ensure safe, nurturing residential environments, provision of effective services and that young people leave ready for success. The facilities voluntarily report data every April and October and after two weeks of PbS data quality checks, the data is reported back to them comparing their current outcomes with prior results and comparing them with the average of all other like participants. This PbS Issue Brief shares aggregated information from participants in April and October 2021. The data comes from detention, assessment, correction and community facilities in 33 states who represent a subset of all juvenile justice placements.

Of the nearly 4,000 tests administered to young people in October, 2.9% were positive compared to 4.4% in April.

During the month of October 2021, nearly 4,000 COVID-19 tests were administered to young people in PbS facilities, or an average of 30 tests per facility. (PbS facilities range in size from average daily populations of eight young people to more than 100; the average of the correction facilities is about 40 young people and the average for detention centers is 30 young people.) In April 2021, a little more than 2,000 tests were administered for an average of about 15 per facility.

While a smaller percentage of young people tested positive in October relative to April (2.9% and 4.4%), a larger number of facilities and programs experienced at least one infection. Almost 24% of facilities reported one or more positive cases in October compared to about 16% in April.

The most common reason for testing was when a young person exhibited symptoms of the virus (used in 85% of facilities). Between April and October, the percent of facilities testing because of exposure increased from 63% to 72% and the percent testing routinely from 24% to 33%. More than 60% continued to test when a young person arrived at the facility and 6% tested randomly.



Of the more than 7,000 tests administered to staff in October, 2.3% were positive for the virus – more than in the 1.7% in April.

More than 7,000 tests were administered to staff in the facilities both in April and October. Of those tests, 2.3% were positive for the virus in October, more than the 1.7% positive rate in April. Almost half of the facilities reported one or more positive cases (47%) in October, compared to 35% of facilities in April.

Testing and test results have been consistent data used to determine how we move forward and when precautionary restrictions can be lifted.

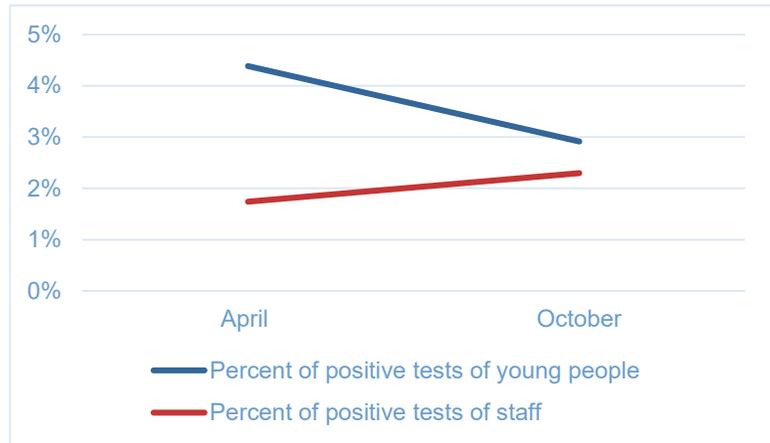


Figure 1: Positive COVID-19 tests among staff and young people in facilities.

More facilities returned to in-person education instruction and opened doors for visits with family.

When the pandemic struck, schools across the country closed their doors, pivoting to remote learning and homework packages to keep young people and teachers safe by preventing the spread of infection. In April 2021, half of the PbS facilities reported they had discontinued their in-person educational instruction and 61% offered online education. In October, in-person education had resumed in all but 28% of the facilities.

The majority of facilities (76%) continued to restrict in-person visits but some have opened their doors with various precautions in place. When the pandemic started, nearly all facilities stopped in-person visits from families, volunteers and attorneys and instead, increased telephone and video calling. In October, more families reported visiting their child (66% compared to about 50% in April) and a significant number chose video calls as their preferred way to connect to their child (39% in October increased from 5% at the pandemic’s outset).

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