



Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who played a pivotal role in the success of The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) Saliva Testing Program and Saliva Research Program this past school year. We are especially grateful for the outstanding leadership and support from:

Principals & School Leads: Your dedication and commitment have been instrumental in guiding the program and research within your schools.

Student & Parent Ambassadors: Your advocacy and support have been integral in engaging the school community and shaping how the program and research can grow and improve in the future.



Introduction

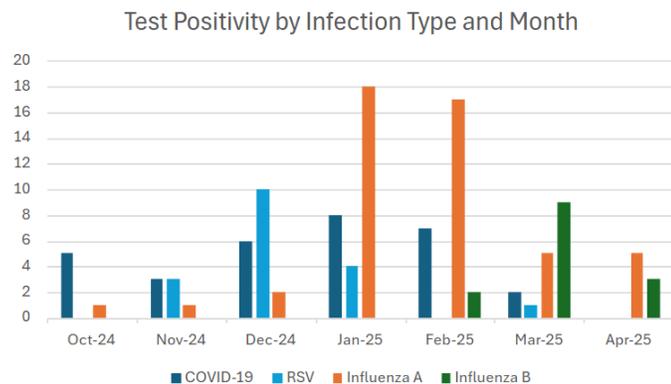
In September 2020, SickKids launched a school community saliva testing program to test for COVID-19 in Toronto schools. In September 2024, the program expanded to include testing for influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in response to increased rates of these viruses the previous year. Over the past year, **30** schools within the Toronto region participated!

Testing Program Highlights

Throughout the program, we received **531** clinical samples from our participating schools!
Over 50% of tests were submitted by students.

Out of the 531 samples received, 21% of tests processed were positive for COVID-19, RSV or influenza.

January, February and March had the highest positivity rates, with ~35% of tests submitted in those months testing positive for either COVID-19, RSV or influenza.



Research Program Highlights

Children that tested positive were asked if they wanted to join a research study to see how long children are contagious and to see how often the viruses spread in their homes. We are still looking at the results, but so far, we have enrolled 49 patients with RSV, 229 with influenza and 23 with COVID-19. This information will help us get ready for future outbreaks and learn what makes it easier for viruses to spread. That way, we can make better plans to keep people safe when these viruses are circulating at high levels.

Several schools also participated in research to better understand how respiratory infections spread among children. This involved testing students in classrooms, either randomly and after a positive case, to understand how often children carry these viruses, even without symptoms, and examine the factors that impact transmission in classrooms. In total, **114** classrooms were tested, with **769** research classroom samples submitted!

To recognize the efforts of schools participating in classroom testing, we celebrated with pizza parties. Congratulations to the winning schools and classrooms for their engagement!

The SickKids Saliva Research Program team has results available from research samples submitted through the classroom testing. If you submitted a classroom sample and did not receive your results, this might be because our team was not able to read the contact information listed on the requisition. Please get in touch with the research team at school.salivaresearch@sickkids.ca or call 647-640-8548 to receive your results.

Program Feedback

The following quotes are testimonials from school staff, students, and school community members about the impact of the program on them and their school community.

"Thanks for providing this program. If I hadn't received their test results or if their test had been negative, I was going to schedule an appointment with their doctor because I wasn't sure what they had."

-Parent of student

"Would definitely do it again. Parents had piece of mind knowing what [infection they] have."

-Principal

"I would tell them to join because they'll learn more about the saliva spit kit and get to know more about viruses."

-Aahil (Student ambassador)

"My son was a student ambassador for SickKids Saliva Testing Program and it was an amazing experience. This gave him a new perspective, which was about why we do these tests and what gets done with the tests after...I think it really closed the loop and sparked a real curiosity"

-Jesse (Parent of Student Ambassador)

"I think the best part about being a student ambassador is being able to spread popularity and to let everyone know that there's these tests going on that will help stop diseases...It's really fun to be able to get to learn what's happening and come here."

-Avery (Student ambassador)

"Our school has embraced this research as it is easy to access and participate and the information that will be collected is important in that it will help us to better support our families, students, and staff to be healthy and remain healthy."

-Principal

Lessons Learned & Future Plans

We asked for feedback and we heard you! Here are changes we are making to improve the programs:

- Reducing the saliva required for sample
- Creating videos about research objectives and opportunities
- Improving our communication materials
- It has been wonderful partnering with schools through the 2024-2025 school year to support the health and well-being of their communities. Thanks to your positive feedback, we are looking at offering the program for the 2025-2026 school year and exploring the possibility of adding additional respiratory infections to our clinical test in addition to RSV, influenza and COVID-19.

From both the Saliva Testing Program and the Saliva Research Program, we wish you all a healthy and fun summer 2025!

We are looking for more program feedback! [Complete our 2-minute program survey!](#)