

**- Virus**

## Study: Most Covid kids' illness mild

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The vast majority of children who become infected with Covid-19 in Australia have mild or no symptoms and caught it at home from their parents rather than at school, according to a landmark new report.

Research published yesterday by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance has found the greatest risk of kids catching the virus is through household spread.

Professor Kristine Macartney, a specialist at Sydney's Children's Hospital at Westmead, said the findings should reassure parents about the safety of schools and the need for parents to get vaccinated to protect their kids.

While rising numbers of children are getting infected — according to the new data, one in three people who contracted Covid-19 since June in Sydney were under 18 — most had few symptoms.

“The majority of children [ 98 per cent] had asymptomatic or mild infection,” Macartney said.

“Covid-19 is mild among children. Only around 2 per cent will require hospitalisation and for many of those 2 per cent, it's for monitoring and social care. Unfortunately, often their parents are unwell with Covid-19 and that's why they're being cared for in the hospital.”

The data is based on infections between June and August and is based on an ongoing study by NCIRS and the University of Sydney, with NSW Health and the NSW Department of Education, that has been tracking Covid transmission in educational settings since March 2020.

The spread of the virus in schools and early learning centres was also largely between adults. But the study's focus was spread since June — when most schools were in lockdown and leading on-line learning.

“What we saw was that the highest rate of spread was actually amongst unvaccinated adult staff and particularly unvaccinated adult staff at the time of the report in childcare centres,” she said.

“The spread of virus also occurred from adults to children but the spread between children themselves was very low.

“This really affirms what we know about the Delta variant. We've seen a higher rate overall of spread from the Delta variant compared to what we saw last year but in children in particular, the majority of children who have become infected have not had symptoms or had only mild symptoms and this is certainly the case for the children infected in educational centres as well.”

Macartney said masks should be worn by teenagers attending high school and even younger children if they wished to do so.

Of the 2864 children infected, 810 (28 per cent) were aged 0-5, 945 (33 per cent) were aged 6-12 and 1109 (39 per cent) were aged 13-18.

Of the children admitted to hospital, two were born in hospital and 68 were admitted from the community. Of these, 25 cases were admitted for social and vulnerable reasons, and 43 for medical reasons.

Of these 43, five young unvaccinated people (aged 15-18) required intensive care. Some had had medical conditions other than Covid-19 that influenced their ICU admission.

Overall, 1680 kids had caught the virus at home.