

UW-Madison: As schools reopen, Oregon virus surveillance project helps families navigate complex time

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MADISON — On March 14, 2020, a child in Oregon, Wisconsin, got sick the day after her school closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of an innovative study monitoring for influenza in the Oregon School District, her whole family performed what is now a familiar exercise for many: a nasal swab.

The samples came back negative for flu — and for 14 other respiratory viruses. Tests for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, weren't yet available. The family recovered, and their samples were kept in a freezer along with all the samples from the district.

More than a year later, with SARS-CoV-2 tests widely available, the study's leaders re-tested hundreds of such samples taken from children and family members before and after the pandemic reached the U.S. The 11-year-old was the only child positive for COVID-19, as were both of her parents. This became the first-known case of household transmission of the disease in Wisconsin.

Since 2015, the study that captured this early transmission, Oregon Child Absenteeism Due to Respiratory Disease Study (ORCHARDS), has been helping Oregon families and schools track and understand seasonal influenza and other respiratory illnesses. With thousands of home visits under their belts and the trust of the community, they were primed to help monitor the spread of COVID-19 as well.

Now, with a new three-year, \$3 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ORCHARDS will have the opportunity to continue helping schools

and families navigate COVID-19 and other illnesses as in-person instruction resumes. And they'll continue to learn about the spread of COVID-19 in children and their families outside of any visit to a hospital, which is understudied.

"We're entering this really tumultuous period, as children — only some of whom can be vaccinated — are returning to school," says study leader Jon Temte, a University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health professor and associate dean. "By going out an additional three years now, we'll be able to document what happens in terms of SARS-CoV-2, influenza, and other respiratory illnesses during this evolving pandemic period."

STORY CONTINUES AT <https://news.wisc.edu/as-schools-reopen-oregon-virus--surveillance-project-helps-families-navigate-complex-time/>