

COVID-19 in the lives of Brazilian children and adolescents: few symptoms and many impacts

A COVID-19 na vida de crianças e adolescentes brasileiros: poucos sintomas e muitos impactos

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Since March 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) decreed the pandemic of COVID-19, a disease caused by the Sars-Cov-2¹ virus, the world has come to live with an invisible enemy responsible for a strong impact in the fields of health, social, economic and political. Since then, all countries have been trying to control the global crisis that has taken place in global public health and culminated in the deaths of millions of people.

Given this reality, some measures were adopted to control the spread of the virus, such as hand hygiene, use of masks, and social distancing/isolation, which resulted in the closure of schools. However, one factor caught the scientific community's attention: the highest morbidity and mortality rates by COVID-19 were concentrated in the adult and, mainly, elderly population. Children and adolescents were less affected by severe cases of the disease, with no need for hospitalization and with reduced mortality rates when compared to other age groups.

One of the first studies in China, published in mid-2020, described the epidemiological characteristics of COVID-19 in 2,143 patients under 18, 731 confirmed and 1,412 suspected. Of these cases, more than 90% were asymptomatic, mild, and moderate, and only 5.9% evolved to clinical conditions considered severe and critical².

From this scenario, the authors pointed out that the large proportion of asymptomatic and mild cases in this population could hinder the identification of epidemiological information, leading to the risk of infections acquired in the community³. Meta-analysis on susceptibility and transmission of SARS-CoV-2 among children and adolescents compared to adults concluded that existing evidence indicates lower susceptibility to the virus in the pediatric and adolescent age group. However, regarding the lower role of children and adolescents in transmitting SARS-Cov-2 to adults, there is little evidence⁴.

This context raises concern that mild or asymptomatic symptomatic children are possibly potential transmitters of the virus for the adult and elderly population⁵, which reinforces the need to suspend school activities.

The absence of school life for a prolonged period and the need for home confinement of families, associated with the experience of uncertainties arising from the pandemic, generated a substantial impact on the mental health of children and adolescents around the world, as well as interferences in their global development and socialization.

The pandemic also drove families away from health services, which led to the discontinuity of routine vaccination and the risk of resurgence of immunopreventable diseases⁶. In countries such as Brazil, it brought numerous problems arising from social inequality, such as malnutrition, intrafamily violence, unemployment, and financial instability⁷.

In this context, actions are made fundamental to identify the problems faced by families, assess needs in early childhood and pregnancy, daily size vulnerabilities, and negative consequences of social distancing and insecurity in housing, nutrition, affection, and development, intending to intervene effectively and creatively in the challenges and uncertainties imposed by the pandemic⁸.

Because of the above, Covid-19, although generally manifested slightly in the pediatric age group, has been responsible for many negative impacts on the health and life of most Brazilian children and adolescents, mainly impacting those who live in situations of vulnerability.

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