

Seasonal Respiratory Virus Circulation was Diminished during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Background: Measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic intended to address the spread of SARS-CoV-2 may also influence the incidence of other common seasonal respiratory viruses (SRV). This evaluation reports laboratory confirmed cases of common SRV in a well-defined region of central Canada to address this issue. Methods: Surveillance data for common non-SARS-CoV-2 SRV in the Ottawa, Canada region was provided by the Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association (EORLA) reference virology lab. Weekly reports of the number of positive tests and proportion that yielded positive results was analyzed from August 26, 2018 to January 2, 2022. Results: A drastic reduction in influenza and other common SRV was observed during the 2020-2021 influenza season in the Ottawa region. Influenza was virtually undetected post SARS-CoV-2 emergence. Rhinoviruses and enteroviruses were the only viruses that remained relatively unaffected during this period. Conclusions: We speculated that the introduction of non-pharmaceutical measures including masking to prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission contributed to the near absence of SRV in the Ottawa region. These measures should remain a key component in addressing spikes in SRV activity and future pandemics.

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