

# The Resilient Child: Sex Hormones and COVID-19 Incidence in Pediatric

## Patients

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**Abbreviations:** Angiotensin-Converting Enzymes, ACE; Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome, ARDS; Androgen Receptor, AR; Androgen Receptor Elements, AREs; Angiotensin II Type I Receptor, AT<sub>1</sub>R; Center for Disease Control, CDC; Corona Viruses CoV; Corona Virus Disease-2019, COVID19; Cytokine Release Syndrome, CRS; Influenza A Virus, IAV; Influenza B Virus, IBV; Intensive Care Unit, ICU; Induced-Pluripotent Stem Cells, iPSC; Length of Stay, LOS; Receptor Mas, MasR; Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, MERS; Receptor Binding Protein, RBP; Renin-Angiotensin System, RAS; Ribonucleic Acid, RNA; Respiratory Syncytial Virus, RSV; Replication-Transcription Complex, RTC; Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS; Single Nucleotide Polymorphism, SNP; Type-II Transmembrane Serine Protease-2, TMPRSS2; World Health Organization, WHO

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## Abstract

COVID-19, a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 infection, has become an unprecedented global health emergency, with fatal outcomes among adults of all ages in the United States, and the highest incidence and mortality in adult males. As the pandemic evolves there is limited understanding of a potential association between symptomatic viral infection and age. To date, there is no knowledge of the role children (pre-pubescent, ages 9 to 13) play as “silent” vectors of the virus, with themselves being asymptomatic. Throughout different time frames and geographic locations, the current evidence on COVID-19 suggests that children are getting infected at a significantly lower rate than other age groups - as low as 1%. Androgens upregulate the protease TMPRSS2 (Type-II Transmembrane Serine Protease-2), which facilitates efficient virus-host cell fusion with the epithelium of the lungs, thus increasing susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection and development of severe COVID-19. Due to low levels of steroid hormones, pre-pubertal children may have low expression of TMPRSS2, thereby limiting the viral entry into host cells. As the world anticipates a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2, the role of pre-pubescent children as vectors transmitting the virus must be interrogated to prepare for a potential resurgence of COVID-19. This review discusses the current evidence on the low incidence of COVID-19 in children and the effect of sex steroid hormones on SARS-CoV-2 viral infection and clinical outcomes of pediatric patients. Upon reopening society at large, schools will need to implement heightened health protocols, with the knowledge that children as the “silent” viral transmitters, can significantly impact the adult populations.

**Key words:** Puberty, Androgens, Estrogens, Immune System, Children

## 1 Introduction

2 In February 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) formally named the novel coronavirus  
3 outbreak triggered by 2019-nCoV as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The International Committee of  
4 Taxonomy of Viruses then named the disease Severe Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2),  
5 another  $\beta$ -coronavirus cluster related to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of 2003 and Middle  
6 East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) of 2012 (1, 2). As of May 5, 2020, the global pandemic had caused  
7 over 3.5 million cases and 240,000 deaths, with numbers rising each day (3).

8 Person-to-person transmission of the virus includes droplet inhalation transmission and contact  
9 transmission through oral, nasal, and eye mucous membrane contacts (4). Symptoms of the virus vary  
10 depending on the patient but often include fever and dry cough, while others suffer from fatigue,  
11 dyspnea, nasal congestion, nausea, or diarrhea (5). The inflammation-driven damaging phase involves  
12 viral-induced tissue destruction, compounded by the development of cytokine release syndrome (CRS)  
13 causing debilitating effects (6). Cases worsen and lead to Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) or  
14 the development of pneumonia. However, diagnosis is often complicated by a large portion of patients  
15 who are asymptomatic (7). Those with pre-existing conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension and  
16 pulmonary-, cardiac-, and kidney-disease are considered to be at higher risk of developing a severe form  
17 of the disease (8–10). Sex and age have also been important risk factors, as men and older populations  
18 are most at risk of contracting the infection and developing a more serious disease (11–14). The  
19 potential involvement of certain HLA haplotypes in increasing susceptibility to infection, supports a  
20 genetic pre-disposition (6). This review discusses the current evidence on the incidence of COVID-19 in  
21 children and the role of sex steroid hormones in the rate of SARS-CoV-2 infection and the clinical  
22 outcomes in pediatric patients.

23

24

## 25 COVID-19 Clinical Presentation in Pediatric Patients

26 The incidence of COVID-19 in children has been significantly lower compared to adults, with  
27 clear underrepresentation when taking into account the age proportions of the overall population.  
28 Comprehensive CDC data reported that between February 12th and April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020, patients younger  
29 than 18 years old accounted for only 1.7% of US cases (11). Among all 2,572 COVID-19 cases in children  
30 aged <18 years, the median age was 11 years (range 0–17 years); 59% were ages 10-17, 26% were ages  
31 1-9, and 15% were ages <1 year (11). Early reports from China echoed the recent US findings. A study  
32 presenting the 72,314 cases diagnosed by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
33 showed that most cases were in the adult age range of 30 to 79 years old (87%), with only 1% aged 10 to  
34 19 years, and 1% aged 9 years or younger. There were also no deaths that occurred in children less than  
35 9 years old (15). The current evidence on COVID-19 indicates that children are getting infected at a  
36 significantly lower rate than other age groups – as low as 1% of reported cases in most case studies (11,  
37 16, 17). Similar trends were seen during the SARS epidemic, as children <12 years old had less severe  
38 cases of the disease, no deaths reported, and the disease was seen to increase in severity with age (18).

39 This trend may be due in part to the lack of testing in pediatric patients, as a large number of  
40 infected individuals are asymptomatic (5, 11, 16, 19, 20). Children are just as likely to be exposed to and  
41 contract SARS-CoV-2 but are less likely to be symptomatic for COVID-19 and thus are less likely to be  
42 tested as well (21). As similar rates were detected among the pediatric population during the SARS  
43 epidemic, there may also be an underlying molecular mechanism decreasing the susceptibility of  
44 children to developing a severe form of COVID-19 disease. Thus, case count is not always an accurate  
45 measurement of incidence, as there are asymptomatic children who are impacted by COVID-19 but are  
46 not part of the case count due to the lack of testing (19, 20). Among symptomatic children who were  
47 tested, the incidence of COVID-19 was still low. In an early report from the Wuhan Children’s Hospital,  
48 1,391 children who had upper respiratory symptoms resembling those of SARS-CoV-2 infections were

49 assessed and only 171 (12.3%) had COVID-19, with the median age of COVID-19-positive patients being  
50 6.7 years, a younger median age than the CDC report from the United States due to the younger  
51 population studied (17). Death count, which is another more standardized measurement that has been  
52 used to control for testing capabilities, has also been low in the pediatric population, with some case  
53 reports reporting 0-0.2% deaths in patients under 19 years old (11, 22). Furthermore, 80% of the  
54 reported severe cases in children by the CDC were children that had an underlying condition, with the  
55 most common being chronic respiratory problems like asthma (11). The incidence, case count, severity  
56 of symptoms, and death rate, are all lower in pediatric patients compared to adult populations (Table 1)  
57 (22–28).

58 The pediatric experience at Mount Sinai supports the concept that children are less severely  
59 affected by COVID-19 than adults. Between March 1<sup>st</sup> through April 24<sup>th</sup> – representing the height of the  
60 pandemic in New York City – 29 children were admitted to the Kravis Children’s Hospital at Mount Sinai  
61 with COVID-19. Ages ranged from 4 weeks to 21 years of age. There were 16 male and 13 female  
62 patients. The average length of stay (LOS) for this group was 4.5 days. Five of the 29 patients received  
63 ICU-level care. None required intubation and there were no deaths in the cohort. Two of the patients  
64 were babies in the NICU, where the average LOS was 2 days. At the end of April 2020, past the initial  
65 adult peak in New York City, reports began emerging of children with symptoms unlike the respiratory  
66 symptoms of cough and shortness seen in adults. Children have presented with skin rashes,  
67 conjunctivitis and an inflammatory vascular phenomenon that involves the heart. Initially high fever,  
68 tachycardia and hypotension were noted, in some cases precipitous decompensation requiring ICU  
69 admission occurred. As of this report, seven patients with this syndrome have required ICU care,  
70 including one that required ECMO; no fatalities have been seen. Resemblance to the pediatric illness  
71 Kawasaki’s disease has been noted. Interestingly, one of these patients tested negatively on three  
72 occasions for COVID-19, only to have a later bronchial lavage sample be positive. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, an

73 international conference confirmed the pathophysiology in a similar cohort of pediatric patients in  
74 Europe.

75 Typical symptoms in children include fever, cough, and shortness of breath (Table 1) (11, 22, 23,  
76 29). Symptoms among pediatric patients tend to compare in nature to those in adults, though the  
77 overall severity of the symptoms and frequency of manifestation is lower (22). However, the sex  
78 discrepancy in the incidence of COVID-19 amongst adults is not reflected in the pediatric population.  
79 Adult males have significantly higher risk of ICU admission and death than adult females diagnosed with  
80 COVID-19 (12). In the pediatric population, there have been no significant differences in the number or  
81 severity of COVID-19 cases across sex (Table 1) (16). Thus, the different incidence rates between sexes  
82 only appears with adulthood, suggesting hormonal changes and sexual maturity may affect viral  
83 transmission and clinical symptom manifestations.

84 The low case number for pediatric patients being treated for COVID-19, presents a limitation in  
85 determining transmission patterns among this young population. In a case report tracing the  
86 transmission cluster of one pediatric case in France, a child who tested positive for COVID-19 visited  
87 three schools, and 169 individuals had been in contact with the student. Of these contacts, 70  
88 individuals presented with respiratory symptoms. After testing 73 of these contacts, only 13 tested  
89 positive for COVID-19 (30). The low incidence amongst the contacts of confirmed positive children raises  
90 the possibility that SARS-CoV-2 follows a different transmission process in children than in adults,  
91 impacting the rate of viral infection and clinical manifestation of COVID-19 (22, 30). Moreover it was  
92 reported that the virus in pediatric patients is present in higher levels in stool samples than in the  
93 respiratory epithelium, raising the possibility that the virus may be transmitted through fomites from  
94 contaminated feces instead of the suspected transmission through respiratory droplets in this  
95 population (31).

96 In efforts to define the transmission dynamic among pediatric patients, one must also consider  
97 the potential spread through expecting mothers. A recent systematic review of cases in pregnant  
98 women recommended that pregnant women be treated as a high priority patient due to their  
99 immunosuppression (32, 33). Others have reported no severe or lethal cases in pregnancy, with some  
100 even suggesting a protective effect by pregnancy (34–37). In one report, it was suggested that there was  
101 no vertical transmission of the viral from mother to fetus, due to the absence of the virus in the amniotic  
102 fluid, cord blood samples, and breast milk, as well as swabs from the newborns (37). Of the reported  
103 cases of vertical transmission, the positively testing neonates recovered safely (22, 38, 39). Similar  
104 patterns were also shown in SARS, with no evidence of vertical transmission from infected mothers to  
105 their children (18).

106 The question thus arises as to a cut-off age for children for SARS-CoV2 infections and viral  
107 propagation. In addition to the lower case counts among pediatric patients, there is particularly lower  
108 incidence among younger children. In a large CDC cohort, 25% of pediatric patients were 1-10 years old,  
109 whereas nearly 60% of pediatric patients were ages 10-19 years old (11). This could be caused by the  
110 immunological changes and increasing hormone levels associated with puberty, but it is also important  
111 to understand the effects of adrenarche and the production of androgens in this process. Adrenarche is  
112 an early stage in sexual maturation in both sexes, in which the adrenal glands secrete increased levels of  
113 weak adrenal androgens including dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate  
114 (DHEA-S) and androstenedione (A4) without increased cortisol levels (40). It is a process related to  
115 puberty but distinct from hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal (HPG axis) maturation and function (41).  
116 Adrenarche occurs on average at age 6 to 8 years and precedes puberty by about 2 years (40). Puberty  
117 in girls usually lasts from around 8-14 years of age, and for boys, it lasts from 10-16 years of age on  
118 average. The similar sex compositions across ages among those COVID-19 pediatric patients suggest  
119 effects from adrenarche rather than puberty, as the synchronous hormonal changes increase



120 susceptibility across both sexes until adulthood when men are at increased risk due to higher androgen  
121 levels (42, 43).

122

### 123 **Molecular Mechanisms of SARS-CoV-2 Infection**

124 Structural Spike (S) proteins drive entry of coronaviruses SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 into target  
125 host cells by engaging the cellular receptor, Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2), and facilitating the  
126 viral attachment to target cells (44). This step is also functionally associated with activation of cellular  
127 TMPRSS2, a type-II transmembrane serine protease, that drives the entry of virus into the target cell and  
128 is regulated by Androgen Receptor (AR) signaling. Successful SARS-CoV infection is dependent on the  
129 proteolytic activity of TMPRSS2, which results in cleavage of SARS S protein at multiple sites (45).  
130 Proteolytic cleavage of SARS S protein by TMPRSS2, known as S priming, mediates efficient virus-host  
131 cell fusion and decreases virus sensitivity to neutralizing antibodies (46). ACE2 depletes Angiotensin I  
132 and II I (Ang I and II) evels by directly catalyzing the compounds and converting Ang I to Angiotensin 1-9  
133 and Ang II to Angiotensin 1-7, known vasodilators acting through MasR with anti-fibrotic, anti-  
134 proliferative, and anti-inflammatory effects (8, 47–49). ACE2 expression is elevated in patients with  
135 cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, and hypertension, comorbidities that confer higher risk of mortality  
136 due to COVID-19 (50–52). Thus, inhibition of the Renin-Angiotensin System (RAS) may affect COVID-19  
137 outcomes by decreasing proinflammatory activity of Ang II or increasing virulence in the heart and lungs  
138 due to the increased ACE2 expression (10).

139 Both ACE2 and TMPRSS2 are co-expressed on ciliated bronchial epithelial cells and type II  
140 pneumocytes, the epithelium of small intestine, and podocytes and the brush border of proximal tubule  
141 cells of the kidney, facilitating routes for SARS-CoV-2 infection (53). Compared to women, males have  
142 higher ACE2 expression and activity in the kidneys and higher expression of TMPRSS2 in the lungs (54,  
143 55). There is also the potential for sex hormones to affect levels of activity of these receptors (56). Not

144 only might this impact the gender disparities in disease incidence, it could also have implications for the  
145 infection rate children who physiologically have low levels sex hormones (57). It is critical to understand  
146 the underlying mechanisms of the low incidence of COVID-19 in pediatric patients and their capacity to  
147 be silent vectors while being asymptomatic (11, 16).

148

#### 149 **Mechanistic Considerations in Diagnosis in Children**

150 ACE2 has been a common target of potential therapies against COVID-19; however, it is  
151 unknown whether this important viral receptor contributes to the lower incidence of COVID-19 in  
152 pediatric patients (58, 59). Several studies have reported no significant differences in lung ACE2  
153 expression levels across sexes, implying that sex-related differences in ACE2 expression are not driving  
154 the sex-related difference in disease severity (55, 56). It is interesting to note that of the 3,984 exomes  
155 for ACE2 obtained from a large Italian cohort, there were no significant differences in the burden of rare  
156 deleterious variants as compared to European and East Asian cohorts (55). The most common single  
157 nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) difference in variants between the European populations and East Asian  
158 populations was rs2285666 (also called G8790A) (55). This variant has been studied as a potential risk  
159 factor for hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and coronary artery disease – comorbidities that increase  
160 susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection and severe virulence (60, 61). Therefore, ACE2 and genetic  
161 variations of its target genes are important to the predisposition of certain populations to higher SAS-  
162 CoV-2 infection, although independent of sex steroid hormones.

163 TMPRSS2 is essential for entry of a variety of viruses, such as SARS-Cov2, MERS-Cov, HCov-229E,  
164 influenza A virus (IAV), and influenza b virus (IBV), in the primary human type II pneumocytes and  
165 enhances the virulent effects on the host (46, 62, 63). Subsequently, there is emerging therapeutic  
166 potential of TMPRSS2 inhibitors in the treatment of COVID-19 (46, 64). The TMPRSS2 gene, located on  
167 human chromosome 21, has several androgen receptor elements (AREs) and TMPRSS2 protein is

168 expressed in an androgen-dependent manner in both prostate and lung cancer cells (65, 66). Androgen-  
169 regulated TMPRSS2 in prostate cells has been demonstrated to play a role in both normal male  
170 reproduction and in progression and metastasis of prostate cancer (67). Its expression in the lung and  
171 sputum has been found to be higher in men than in women (62, 68). This is consistent with increased  
172 susceptibility of men to COVID-19, as the increased TMPRSS2 allows for increased viral entry (64).  
173 TMPRSS2 also has an estrogen-responsive promoter, a mechanistic step that may be of significance in  
174 the hormonal control in pediatric patients as compared to adults (69). As pre-pubertal children have  
175 lower levels of sex steroid hormones, they will then have lower TMPRSS2, resulting in a lower disease  
176 incidence and severity in this age population.

177 While there is evidence that estrogens may influence TMPRSS2 activity, the main driver of  
178 expression of TMPRSS2 appears to be androgens (62). Adrenarche, as mentioned previously, is then an  
179 important time marker for increasing susceptibility in pediatric patients. Data supports that children  
180 ages 10 years and older of both sexes have higher incidence of COVID-19, suggesting the entrance into  
181 adrenarche and production of androgen may increase susceptibility to the virus (11). The presence of  
182 androgens may be even more important than pre-existing conditions, such as asthma, in the pediatric  
183 population. The TMPRSS2 expression in sputum was found to be no different in asthma patients as  
184 compared to healthy patients, yet was still increased in adult men as compared to adult women (68).  
185 Because of these androgenic effects, there is potential to decrease viral entry of host cells and prevent  
186 severe disease in high risk individuals through the use of androgen synthesis inhibitors, used in  
187 treatment of advanced prostate cancer (70). The evidence so far supports that with lower levels of  
188 androgens and estrogens, pediatric patients have low expression of TMPRSS2, limiting the extent of viral  
189 entry into host cells due to decreased protease activity; the lower viral load would lead to less severe  
190 symptoms among children (71).

191

192 **SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Children: Environmental and Hormonal Reasoning**

193 In addition to the potential molecular mechanisms contributing to the decreased incidence and  
194 severity of COVID-19 in pediatric patients, other physiological and environmental factors may be at play.  
195 In general, the pediatric population is exposed to fewer harmful environmental factors, such as smoke  
196 and air pollution, which allows them to have healthier respiratory tracts (72). However, prior studies in  
197 low income communities have shown differential susceptibility to some infectious diseases in children  
198 based on existing environmental, economic and psychological factors (73, 74). Psychological stress is  
199 higher among low-income families and their children, resulting in impaired immune function and hence  
200 higher susceptibility to epidemic diseases (75, 76). Malnutrition in children is also a driving mechanism  
201 for acute respiratory infection and related mortality (77–79). Disparities in vaccine uptake rates could  
202 cause differential susceptibility once exposed to the virus. Vaccine uptake rates are likely to differ by  
203 socioeconomic status, including access to health insurance (73, 74).

204 The child population is constantly exposed to a variety of coronaviruses that make up colds and  
205 flus that circulate endemically. These prior exposures could increase the resilience of children’s immune  
206 systems (18). A study in France tracking infections spread among schools and family clusters found  
207 greater dissemination of picornaviruses and influenza amongst the pediatric population of both groups.  
208 The results suggest these infections are more easily transmitted and potentially more infectious than  
209 COVID-19 in children (30). These results were confirmed in a hospital study of pediatric patients in a  
210 hospital in Wuhan China. Of 366 patients with respiratory infections, 6.3% were detected to have  
211 influenza A, 5.5% had influenza B, and only 1.6% tested positive for COVID-19 (80). Inversely, exposure  
212 to other viruses and viral interference could potentially make these patients *more* susceptible to  
213 contracting the novel coronavirus, a trend seen by the interaction between H1N1 influenza virus and  
214 RSV (81).

215

216 **COVID-19 and Educational and Psychosocial Health Challenges in Pediatric Patients**

217           Despite lower incidence in the pediatric population, children have suffered from the disease in  
218 other indirect ways. Global preventive measures of COVID-19 through social-distancing have prompted  
219 the closure of schools (82). Though reducing COVID-19 incidence and mortality rates, the impact of  
220 school closures can have significant health, economic, and societal consequences for children (85, 86).  
221 These effects are likely to be more prominent in disadvantaged families and their children and may  
222 result in mental health challenges, more compromised nutrition, and economic costs to families who  
223 have suffered wage loss because of COVID-19 (84, 87). For many children, the COVID-19 crisis will mean  
224 falling academically further behind their peers, further increasing existing gaps in educational  
225 inequalities due to the lack of or limitation in internet access and availability of learning materials. In  
226 spite of the reduced COVID-19 risk in children, reopening schools may increase risk of this disease in  
227 teachers and ultimately increasing the risk for the larger community (86).

228           According to the Human Rights Watch, even though children are less likely to experience severe  
229 symptoms of or die with COVID-19 compared to different age groups, job and income loss and economic  
230 insecurity among families are likely to increase rates of child labor, sexual and physical exploitation (87).  
231 The high rates of COVID-19 mortality are also likely to result in large numbers of children losing  
232 significant family members, thereby increasing their psychological and physical vulnerability. For  
233 children living in institutional environments such as refugee camps, justice systems, immigration  
234 detention centers, or orphanages, the risk of COVID-19 and its physical and psychological consequences  
235 are higher due to the close proximity to other infected individuals, limited access to water and  
236 sanitation, and other environmental and health conditions that contribute to the lack of proper health  
237 care (87).

238

## 239 **Future Directions**

240           The concept that androgens correlate directly with TMPRSS2 activity and vulnerability to severe  
241 SARS-CoV-2 infection requires evaluation at the cellular and epidemiological level. It will be significant to  
242 determine if children with higher androgen levels – whether endogenous, as in intersex/DSD conditions  
243 (congenital adrenal hyperplasia) or exogenous, as in transgender adolescents who undergo cross-sex  
244 induction of puberty – demonstrate increased susceptibility to COVID-19 compared to their age- and  
245 chromosomal-sex-matched peers. Conversely, children with hypogonadism, whether natural or induced  
246 by puberty blockade, may be relatively protected from infection. If patients with hyperandrogenism are  
247 determined to be more vulnerable to infection, they and their families would be empowered to assume  
248 extra precautions.

249           When proposing the study of sex-gender minority populations, especially children who cannot  
250 provide their own informed consent to research, it is vital to consider not only the scientific merit of the  
251 project, but also its moral ramifications. For patients with intersex/DSD and transgender conditions,  
252 COVID-19 reinforces the social isolation and alienation from a culture that conflates sex with gender and  
253 perceives both as a male/female binary. Historically, many of these patients experienced their  
254 involvement in research and clinical care as stigmatizing and traumatic, issues that are further  
255 challenged by the isolating measures of the ongoing pandemic (88).

256           As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves implodes globally, the current knowledge at the molecular  
257 level implicates that this disease is biologically under sex steroid control, allowing investigators to better  
258 understand why most children are clinically “silent” carriers of the virus. In addition to TMPRSS2 activity,  
259 driving increased susceptibility to and cell internalization of SARS-CoV-2, further mechanistic insights  
260 into the hormonal regulation of immunological responses also invite an exploration of sex- and age-  
261 related differences. The direct action of androgens (driven by local precursor synthesis and metabolic  
262 alterations) in human lungs must be investigated. The strategy to address these issues will involve the

263 potential use of induced-pluripotent stem cells (iPSC) technology as a means to develop individual-  
264 specific lung epithelial cell lines and organoids that could be used to exploit the SARS-CoV-2 entry into  
265 human cells directly. Infected patients' specific derived alveolar cells dully differentiated under  
266 "reprogramming factors" could potentially populate tissue engineered lungs, provide a cell model for  
267 functional interrogation of lungs from COVID19-patients and drug testing against the disease (89).  
268 Induced to pluripotency stem cells can be differentiated to alveolar epithelium through exposure to a  
269 variety of different culture conditions and growth media. The ultimate success of differentiated cells for  
270 translational medicine applications will depend on further advances in the understanding of the effect of  
271 steroid hormones and SARS-CoV2 infection in human lungs, using *in vitro* cultures and organoids, from  
272 different iPSC to cells resembling respiratory epithelium *in vitro*.

273 At the time of submission of this review (early May 2020), there were emerging reports on a  
274 pediatric multisystem post-infectious inflammatory syndrome (myocarditis, high fever, and  
275 hypotension) resembling the pediatric Kawasaki's disease in SARS-CoV-2 infected children; this clearly  
276 merits further investigation immediately. Global initiatives and policies are needed to understand the  
277 COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen the health protection and social wellness for the most innocent and  
278 yet apparently most resilient members of our population, the children.

279

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281

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**Table 1: Summary of Current Literature on COVID-19 Incidence in Pediatric Patients**

Study	Location	Time Frame in 2020	Pediatric Count	Ages (Range)	Sex	Symptoms	Days to Symptom Onset (Range)	Deaths	Comorbidities
<i>Cai et al. 2020</i>	Shanghai, China	January 19, - February 3,	10	Mean 6.1 yo (3 mo - 11 yo)	1:1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fever 8 (80%)</li> <li>- Cough 6 (60%)</li> <li>- Sore Throat 4 (40%)</li> <li>- Nasal Congestion 3 (30%)</li> <li>- Sneezing and Rhinorrhea 2 (20%)</li> </ul>	Mean 6.5 days (2-10 days)	0	
<i>CDC 2020</i>	United States	February 12-April 2	2,572/149,802 (1.7%)	Median 11 yo (0-17 yo)	57% male, 53% female	- 73% fever, cough, or shortness of breath		3	<p>Of 345 cases with information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 80 (23%) at least one</li> <li>- 40 chronic lung disease (including asthma)</li> <li>- 25 cardiovascular disease</li> <li>- 10 immunosuppression</li> </ul>
<i>Dong et al.</i>	Mainland	January 16 - February	2,143	Median 7	57% males,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asymptomatic 94 (4.4%)</li> <li>- Mild 1091 (50.9%)</li> <li>- Moderate 831 (38.8%)</li> </ul>	Median 2 days (0-42)	1	

2020	China	8		yo	43% female		days)		
<i>Liu et al. 2020</i>	Wuhan, China	January 7 - January 15	6	Median 3 yo (1 - 7 yo)	33% male, 67% female	- High Fever 6 (100%) - Cough 6 (100%) - Vomiting 4 (66.7%)		0	
<i>Lu et al. 2020</i>	Wuhan, China	January 28 - February 26	171	Median 6.7 yo (1 day - 15 yo)	61% male, 39% female	- Asymptomatic 27 (15.8%) - Cough 83 (48.5%) - Pharyngeal Erythema 79 (46.3%) - Fever 71 (41.5%) - Diarrhea 15 (8.8%) - Fatigue 13 (7.6%) - Rhinorrhea 13 (7.6%) - Vomiting 11 (6.4%) - Nasal Congestion 9 (5.3%)		1	
<i>Qiu et al. 2020</i>	Zhejiang, China	January 17 - March 1	36	Mean 8.3 yo (1-16)	64% male, 36% female	- None 10 (28%) - Dry cough 7 (19%) - Dyspnoea or tachypnoea 1 (3%) - Pharyngeal congestion 1 (3%) - Sore throat 2 (6%) - Vomiting or diarrhea 2 (6%) - Fever 13 (36%) - Headache 3 (8%)		0	None
<i>Tang et al. 2020</i>	Shenzhen, China	January 16 - February 8	26	Mean 6.9 yo (0-13yo)	35% male, 65% female	- None 9 (35%) - Fever 11 (42%) - Cough 12 (46%) - Rhinorrhea 2 (8%) - Vomiting 2 (8%) - Diarrhea 10 (38%)		0	None had underlying conditions
<i>Wang et al. 2020</i>	6 provinces in mainland	January 25 - February	31	Mean 7.1 yo (6 mo -	48% male, 52%	- Fever 20 (65%) - Cough 14 (45%) - Fatigue 3 (10%) - Diarrhea 3 (9%)	Mean 5 days	0	



	China	21		17 yo)	female		
<i>Xia et al. 2020</i>	Wuhan, China	January 23 - February 8	20	Median 2.13 yo (1 day - 14.6 yo)	65% male, 35% female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fever 12 (60%)</li> <li>- Cough 13 (65%)</li> <li>- Diarrhea 3 (15%)</li> <li>- Nasal Discharge 3 (15%)</li> <li>- Sore Throat 1 (5%)</li> <li>- Fatigue 1 (5%)</li> <li>- Vomiting 2 (10%)</li> <li>- Tachypnea 2 (10%)</li> </ul>	0 7 (35%) had history of congenital or acquired disease
<i>Xu et al. 2020</i>	Guangzhou, China	- February 20	10	(2 mo - 15 yo)	60% male, 40% female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Asymptomatic 1 (10%)</li> <li>- Coughing 5 (50%)</li> <li>- Sore Throat 4 (40%)</li> <li>- Nasal Congestion/Rhinorrhea 2 (20%)</li> <li>- Diarrhea 3 (3%)</li> </ul>	0

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