

Practices towards SARS-CoV-2 transmission prevention among Polish high school students

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Background:

Adolescents play a significant role in SARS-CoV-2 spread. The study objective was to assess practices towards COVID-19 among final year Polish high school students.

Methods:

Between December 2020-March 2021 an online cross-sectional survey was conducted. Multistage random sampling selected 24 high schools in the Lubuskie region then 51 classes. Students' practices were assessed by an anonymous questionnaire. Significance was tested by Chi-square test.

Results:

Response rate was 72.3%; 638 students (360 females) participated (mean age 18.4 ± 0.6 years); 68.7% attended schools in the cities with <100,000 inhabitants; 31.5% were in the science program. Most (81.3%) declared they always used masks in public spaces in the last month (74.3% males vs 86.1% females, $p < 0.001$; 77.2% of those living in smaller vs 90.5% in larger cities, $p < 0.001$; 89.6% in the science program vs 77.6% - in the other programs, $p < 0.001$); 35% always avoided crowded areas (26.9% males vs 39.4% females, $p = 0.001$; 29.5% living in smaller vs 47% in larger cities, $p < 0.001$; 43.8% in the science program vs 30.9% - in the other programs, $p = 0.002$); 24.3% declared always keeping social distance (19.4% males vs 27.2% females, $p = 0.02$), 29.9% stated they did not touch their faces (25% males vs 33.3% females, $p = 0.02$; 27.2% living in smaller vs 36% in larger cities, $p = 0.02$; 37.8% in the science program vs 26.3% - in the other programs, $p = 0.003$). Among those wearing masks - uncovered noses (64.6%) and masks around the neck (42.3%; 48.1% males vs 38.9% females, $p = 0.02$) were the most frequent incorrect practices.

Conclusions:

Most high school students, in particular males, living in small cities and attending non-science program have inappropriate preventive practices towards COVID-19. Health education programs are urgently needed to better equip students with COVID-19 prevention skills.

Key messages:

- The study shows data of final year high-school students' practices towards COVID-19 and maybe used by public health experts to better address educational campaigns oriented to Polish adolescents.
- Health education aimed at high school students would be crucial to improve compliance with SARS-CoV-2 infection control procedures.