

Adolescent knowledge and emotional outlook on COVID-19. EC Cornish (M.D., SOM), B Stepanyuk, R Mohran, and M. Abdel-Maksoud, School of Medicine, University of Colorado Anschutz.

Overview:

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the education of nearly 94,000 students throughout Denver Public Schools, creating academic and mental health challenges. The COVID Virtual Summer Camp was created to engage middle school students in discussions about COVID-19 topics to increase understanding and decrease anxiety induced by the pandemic.

Methods:

Eighty-five students (62.8% females) were recruited to the virtual camp. Two identical camps took place July 13th- 24th. Curriculum topics included microbiology, immunology, health disparities, recognizing and verifying credible sources, and mental health. Content was presented using short lectures, small group discussions, and Q&A sessions with medical and public health professionals. Participants completed pre- and post-camp surveys assessing their level of understanding COVID-19 topics and emotional states experienced in virtue of the pandemic. Participants described their emotions by choosing words, from a provided word bank, corresponding to positions on a pleasantness vs energy intensity axis (RULER Mood Meter).

Results:

Comparing pre- and post-camp surveys showed a 55% increase ($p < 0.00001$) in confidence discussing infectious diseases and a 40% increase ($p < 0.00001$) in self-reported knowledge about the spread of infectious diseases. Pre- and post-camp surveys showed 62% and 68% of words chosen to describe emotional state were in the unpleasant, high-intensity quadrant, respectively.

Conclusions:

The COVID Virtual Summer Camp increased self-reported knowledge and confidence in discussing infectious diseases. We demonstrated that most emotions towards the pandemic were associated with high energy and unpleasantness, regardless of level of self-reported understanding of topics pertinent to the pandemic.