- 1 School-Related Public Inquiries Received by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic, United States, 2020-2022
- 3

4 Danielle Kleven, MPH¹; Lisa C. Barrios, DrPH²; Lillian Fineman, MPH³; Neha Kanade Cramer,
5 MPH⁴; and Wrishija Roy, MPH⁵

- 6
- 7 ¹ Division of Infectious Disease Readiness and Innovation, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic
- 8 Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA, USA
- 9 ² Division of Readiness and Response Science, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta,
- 10 GA, USA
- ³ Goldbelt Professional Services, Chesapeake, VA, USA
- ⁴ Division of Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA,
- 13 USA
- 14 ⁵ 4ES Corporation, San Antonio, TX, USA
- 15

16 Corresponding Author:

- 17 Danielle Kleven, MPH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Emerging and
- 18 Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, Division of Infectious Disease Readiness and Innovation, 1600 Clifton Rd
- 19 NE, Atlanta, GA 30333, USA.
- 20 Email: <u>DKleven@cdc.gov</u>

21 Abstract

Objectives: After supporting the COVID-19 emergency response and responding to public inquiries, we sought to identify common themes to prepare for and improve future emergency response efforts. We examined how often various themes (topics) were asked of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through CDC-INFO (agents who respond to public requests) about the COVID-19 pandemic and kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) schools, whether inquiries included questions or complaints, how theme frequency changed, and how the source of CDC-INFO agent responses varied by theme.

29

Methods: We analyzed inquiries (questions or complaints) received by CDC-INFO from January 17, 2020, to November 8, 2022. We pilot-tested our protocol by coding 300 inquiries to create a code book with 11 themes (eg, quarantine and isolation, general guidance) and then tested them for interrater reliability before coding 4000 additional randomly selected inquiries (of 24 502 inquiries received). We then compiled descriptive statistics and used Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to compare differences between frequencies of categorical variables.

36

37 Results: We found 2180 inquiries related to K-12 schools and COVID-19 and assigned 1 or more 38 themes for analysis (resulting in 2439 themes). The most common theme was quarantine and isolation 39 (39%). Across all themes, except for closures, the frequency of questions was greater than the frequency 40 of complaints. For 5 of 11 themes (closure, general guidance, face masks, quarantine and isolation, 41 travel), we found significant differences in inquiry frequency over time. For all themes, except for 42 travel, we found significant differences in which sources CDC-INFO agents used to respond to inquiries. 43

44 Conclusions: Public health officials should be prepared to respond to school-based questions about
 45 quarantine and isolation and to address various topics as the emergency changes over time.

46 In January 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began responding to the 2019 novel coronavirus (later named COVID-19) pandemic.¹ One aspect of this response was providing 47 guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) schools. CDC 48 provided information to the public through the CDC-INFO contact center, to which anyone can call or 49 email with a question, complaint, or comment.² The term "inquiry" is an umbrella term that describes all 50 51 telephone calls or emails to CDC-INFO, regardless of content. The CDC-INFO contact center is staffed by agents who receive the inquiries and respond to them. Agents use prepared responses or the CDC 52 53 website to provide answers to common questions and escalate any complex inquiries to CDC experts. 54 Agents track information in a secure system, such as the inquiry's broad topic, the inquiry's content, and 55 how they handled an inquiry, with de-identified information available internally upon request. 56 Because of the uncertain nature of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time, the number of inquiries 57 that CDC-INFO received increased from 213 255 during the year before the pandemic (January 2019, 2019, to January 19, 2020) to 941 745 during the first year of the pandemic (January 20, 2020, to 58 59 January 20, 2021) (email communication, Su Yeon Bae, CDC, February 10, 2023). Many of these inquiries related to K-12 schools. We (D.K., L.C.B., N.K.C.) responded to many of these inquiries and 60 61 recognized the opportunity to learn from this experience. This analysis of prior inquiries may inform 62 public health guidance for schools before, during, and after emergencies and improve how health 63 officials respond to public inquiries during a crisis. 64 Our study had 4 primary research questions: 65 1) How often did CDC receive inquiries about various K-12 school topics? 2) How did the frequency of K-12 school questions versus complaints vary by theme? 66 67 3) How did the frequency of K-12 school themes vary over time? 68 4) How did CDC-INFO agent response sources (website, prepared responses, escalation to 69 subject matter experts, or no action needed) for K-12 school topics vary by theme? 70 71 **Methods** 72 Study Sample 73 This study is a retrospective analysis of secondary data from CDC's CDC-INFO inquiry tracking 74 system. This activity was reviewed by CDC, deemed not research, and conducted consistent with

75 applicable federal law and CDC policy (accession # NCHHSTP-DASH-2/15/23-befa8). An inquiry may

76 include 1 or more questions or complaints.

77 CDC-INFO statisticians compiled a report using Power BI Desktop Version: 2.109.782.0 78 (Microsoft Corp) containing all CDC-INFO inquiries that included the word "school" (the setting of 79 interest) and excluded the words "invite" or "interview" (invitations for interviews or speakers were 80 excluded as not directly related to K-12 guidance content). In this report, only inquiries assigned 1 or 81 more of the following topics by CDC-INFO agents were included: "coronavirus", "novel coronavirus 82 2019", or "novel coronavirus 2019, China." This report contained inquiries from January 17, 2020 (when the first inquiry meeting inclusion criteria occurred), through November 8, 2022 (when data 83 84 collection for the purpose of this study ceased).

The initial inclusion dataset contained 28 838 inquiries. When sorting by inquiry identification numbers, we identified and removed 4336 duplicates, resulting in 24 502 total inquiries. We established a process that led us to a final set of inquiries to analyze for the purpose of this study.

88 First, we developed a data coding protocol that listed the inclusion and exclusion criteria, along 89 with a list of proposed themes and their definitions. We created all coding using Excel (Microsoft Corp). 90 Before conducting the analysis, we pilot-tested this protocol with a simple random sample of 100 91 inquiries from the 24 502 total. We independently reviewed inquiries to determine whether the inquiry 92 was relevant for inclusion. We considered inquiries relevant if they had a clear question or complaint 93 and were related to COVID-19 and K-12 school staff or students in the United States. During this pilot 94 testing, if the inquiry was relevant, we independently selected 1 or more themes describing the inquiry 95 content. We completed 3 rounds of this process, discussing discrepancies after each round of coding, 96 combining some of the themes, and updating definitions for clarity and to improve interrater reliability. 97 During the first 2 rounds of testing, 7 people coded inquiries. In the final round of pilot testing, we 98 reduced the group to 4 coders to improve consistency. We did not include the 300 pilot-tested inquiries 99 in the final analysis. The final list of 11 themes included the following: closure, general guidance, high-100 risk/disability (ie, students or staff at high risk of severe disease or with a disability), prevention— 101 cleaning, prevention-distance, prevention-face masks, prevention-vaccines, quarantine and 102 isolation, special settings, testing, and travel. The general guidance theme typically included broad 103 questions such as "What is CDC's guidance on COVID-19 for K-12 schools?"

104 Second, after completing pilot testing, we used the Cohens κ coefficient to analyze interrater 105 reliability for the final round of 100 pilot inquiries on the decision to keep or exclude an inquiry and 106 how often the coders independently selected the same theme. To ensure good interrater reliability, we 107 assessed Cohen κ values between each pair of coders. We then validated agreement with all 4 coders

108 combined by using the Gwet AC1 statistic. For both the Cohen κ coefficient and the Gwet AC1 statistic, 109 we considered agreement to be very good if κ was 0.8 to 1 and good if κ was 0.6 to 0.8.³

For the analysis, we targeted having at least 30 inquiries for each of the 11 themes, which led to 110 111 a minimum target sample size of 330 inquiries. We increased the sample size by approximately 12 times 112 (to 4000 inquiries) because a large number of inquiries would not be relevant, sufficient cell sizes would 113 also be needed for the period and disposition analyses, and the number of relevant inquiries per theme 114 was unevenly distributed. After completing pilot testing and ensuring sufficient interrater reliability, the 115 4 authors (D.K., L.C.B., N.K.C., W.R.) who coded inquiries during pilot testing were each assigned a 116 random sample of 1000 inquiries from the remaining 24 202 inquiries to review for relevancy and to code with 1 or more themes. We regularly met throughout the coding process to discuss how to assign 117 118 complex inquiries. Of the 4000 inquiries reviewed, we identified 2180 as relevant for the analysis and 119 coded them accordingly. The number of relevant inquiries exceeded the minimum target sample size of 120 330 inquiries for analysis and ensured that even themes with fewer inquiries had at least 30 inquiries. 121 We considered the remaining 1820 inquiries irrelevant and excluded them from analysis. For example, 122 we excluded inquiries that were about non-K-12 schools (eg, preschools, colleges), those asking for 123 guidance for schools outside the United States, or any inquiries without a clear question or complaint.

124 Finally, for all inquiries that included multiple themes, we duplicated entries so that the 125 identification number was represented once per relevant theme to ensure that all themes would be 126 captured in the analysis. Of the 2180 inquiries retained as relevant, 251 included multiple themes, 127 resulting in 2439 themes coded. We noted whether each inquiry included a complaint or a question and 128 excluded inquiries that consisted only of a comment.

129

130 Statistical Analyses

To understand how the frequency of themes varied over time, we split the 1027 days of data collected 131 132 into 5 sections of 204 to 205 days. We chose 5 sections because each section captured multiple key 133 events in the COVID-19 pandemic¹ (Table 1) and school guidance updates and were also feasible for

134 analysis. These sections included time 1 (T1): January 17-August 8, 2020; time 2 (T2): August 9, 2020-

March 1, 2021; time 3 (T3): March 2–September 23, 2021; time 4 (T4): September 24, 2021–April 17, 135

136 2022; and time 5 (T5): April 18–November 8, 2022.

137 CDC-INFO agents assign each inquiry a disposition, which represents how they responded to the 138 inquirer. To understand how CDC-INFO response sources varied by theme, we combined the 12 139

disposition categories represented in this project into 4 key categories for analysis:

- Prepared response: Existing category used when an agent shared a pre-created response
 to common questions, which allows them to answer questions quickly.
- 142 2. Website: Existing category used when an agent shared information directly from the143 CDC website in response to the inquiry.
- 1443. Escalation: Used when an agent escalates the inquiry to subject matter experts at CDC for145response. This new category included the following original disposition categories: clarification146(email only), escalation, program referral, program response, and transferred.
- 4. No CDC action: Used when an agent determines no further action is needed. This new
 category included the following original disposition categories: agent terminated, call dropped,
 external referral, for your information, and publication request. Examples include questions or
 complaints on topics outside CDC's role, such as decisions on school closures, letters allowing
 students to end their quarantine or isolation period, and requests to report schools for not
 following CDC guidelines.
- 153

We conducted Pearson χ^2 goodness-of-fit tests to compare differences between frequencies of categorical variables, with *P* <.05 considered significant. We used SAS version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc) to conduct all analyses.

157

158 **Results**

159 Interrater Reliability

160 The Cohen κ for interrater reliability between coders for whether to keep or exclude an inquiry ranged 161 from 0.69 to 0.76 when compared with 1 other rater, indicating a substantial degree of agreement. The 162 combined interrater reliability of all 4 coders together resulted in a Cohen κ of 0.73, which is considered 163 good agreement. The κ statistic for agreement on the primary theme ranged from 0.59 to 0.74, with a 164 combined κ of 0.67, which is considered good agreement. The Gwet AC1 statistic was 0.73, which is 165 considered good agreement and sufficient to move from pilot to larger-scale analyses.

166

167 *Theme Frequencies*

168 We coded a total of 2439 themes. Quarantine and isolation was the most common theme (38.7% of

- 169 inquiries), followed by general guidance (20.5%), and prevention—face masks (12.1%) (Figure 1).
- 170

171 Questions Versus Complaints

- 172 Most inquiries received were questions (74.2%) rather than complaints (25.8%). For all themes except
- 173 general guidance, we found a significant difference (P < .05) between the proportion of questions and
- the proportion of complaints. Inquiry themes with a significantly higher proportion of questions than
- 175 complaints included high-risk/disability (81.8% vs 18.2%), prevention—cleaning (87.8% vs 12.2%), and
- 176 prevention—distance (74.2% vs 25.8%) (Figure 2). The only inquiry theme with a significantly lower
- 177 proportion of questions than complaints was closure (30.1% vs 69.9%).
- 178

179 Frequency Over Time

- 180 Because of a low frequency of inquiries (n = 112) during T5, we removed this period from the χ^2
- 181 comparison. The proportion of inquiries differed significantly across the remaining 4 periods for 5 of the
- 182 11 themes: closure (P = .01), general guidance (P < .001), prevention—face masks (P < .001),
- quarantine and isolation (P < .001), and travel (P = .02) (Table 2). Inquiries about closure (49 of 471;
- 184 10.4%), general guidance (192 of 471; 4.8%), and travel (39 of 471; 8.3%) were most common during
- 185 T1, while inquiries about prevention—face masks (177 of 688; 25.7%) were most common during T3,
- and inquiries about quarantine and isolation were most common during T4 (339 of 549; 23.6%).
- 187

188 *Themes and Dispositions*

- 189 For all themes except travel, we found significant differences in how CDC-INFO agents responded to
- 190 inquiries. Agents most often used prepared responses to answer inquiries (986 of 2439; 40.4%),
- 191 followed by escalation (497 of 2439; 20.4%), and website (355 of 2439; 14.6%) (Table 3). An additional
- 192 24.6% of inquiries (601 of 2439) required no CDC action.

Compared with other methods CDC-INFO agents used to respond to inquiries, closure and prevention—face masks received significantly higher proportions of inquiries requiring no CDC action (50.5% and 32.5%, respectively), while general guidance, prevention—distance, prevention—vaccines, quarantine and isolation, special settings, and testing had significantly higher proportions of inquiries answered with prepared responses (35.6%, 39.4%, 42.1%, 49.8%, 35.3%, 43.9%, respectively) (Table 3).

Inquiries related to high-risk/disability, prevention—cleaning, and special settings resulted in a
greater proportion of escalations to subject matter experts compared with other response sources (36.4%,
42.9%, and 30.0%, respectively) (Table 3).

203 Discussion

204 The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for rapid sharing of public health guidance in an ever-205 changing environment. This need for rapid sharing was especially critical for K-12 schools, where 206 recommendations for staff and students often included school closures and quarantine and isolation 207 periods.⁴ Public uncertainty⁵ may have resulted in an increased number of inquiries to CDC related to public health guidance. Inquiry themes also may have changed based on which topics were included in 208 209 news coverage or social media posts. During the period reviewed, CDC received 24 502 inquiries 210 related to K-12 schools and COVID-19. This number is much higher than the number of inquiries 211 received for other populations in other emergencies; for example, the 4661 inquiries related to 2009 212 H1N1 and pregnant, postpartum, or breastfeeding women in a prior study of H1N1 inquiries⁶ and the 108 inquiries from an Ebola and maternal health study.⁷ This increase in inquiries may be a result of the 213 large proportion of the population who are K-12 students, their families, or staff members; the long time 214 215 frame and widespread nature of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the effects of school closures and 216 quarantine and isolation, such as disruptions to parents' ability to work and the need for families to navigate increased caregiving responsibilities and conflict.^{4,8} 217

CDC received many questions about COVID-19 quarantine and isolation related to K-12 218 settings, which is understandable because it had a large effect on individuals' daily lives.⁸ Interestingly, 219 the frequency of inquiries about quarantine and isolation was greater than the frequency of inquiries 220 related to prevention in the K-12 setting, perhaps because of the aforementioned effect on families. 221 222 Similarly, a study focusing on maternal health inquiries during the 2014-2015 Ebola response found that infection control was the most common inquiry topic,⁷ and a study focusing on hepatitis C inquiries 223 found that transmission was the second most common inquiry topic.⁹ However, during the H1N1 224 pandemic, inquiries related to pregnant women were primarily related to vaccines (69%), with fewer 225 inquiries related to infection control (13%).⁶ The later accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines for children 226 than for adults, as well as our study's focus on the school setting, likely captured fewer vaccine-related 227 228 inquiries than the study of pregnant women during H1N1. Although travel was included in only 2.9% of 229 inquiries related to COVID-19 and K-12 schools, it was one of the most frequent inquiry topics (42%) 230 during the 2015 Zika outbreak, whereas transmission constituted only 9% of inquiries.¹⁰ The low 231 frequency of travel-related inquiries in this study compared with the study during Zika may be a result 232 of the K-12 school–specific focus rather than the overall population, because Zika was primarily being 233 transmitted outside the United States, or the primary transmission of Zika through mosquitoes rather than close person-to-person contact,¹¹ which may have affected risk perceptions. 234

The higher frequency of questions than complaints overall highlights the public's need for information that is easy to access, understand, and apply, especially during times of uncertainty, such as during a novel pandemic.¹² The topic of closures received many more complaints than questions, likely because of frustration at the large effect it had on families and staff, many of whom faced new childcare challenges.¹³ Interestingly, although also impactful, quarantine and isolation received many more questions than complaints, perhaps because of the relatively shorter effect of quarantine and isolation (often <14 d vs semester-long closures).¹⁴

242 The number of inquiries gradually increased from T1, to T2, to T3, slowly dropped during T4, 243 and then declined sharply in T5. The gradual increase may provide insight about what public health 244 professionals can expect in future responses. Understandably, most frequencies in themes decreased 245 over time as initial questions were answered and more information was available online. However, 246 questions about prevention—face masks increased significantly during T3, likely because of changes in 247 social distancing recommendations from 6 feet to 3 feet in the school setting while wearing face masks,¹⁵ along with many students returning to in-person learning.¹⁶ The frequency of the quarantine 248 249 and isolation theme increased in T2, decreased in T3, and then increased again in T4. This fluctuation in 250 inquiry frequency was likely because of the alignment of the time period with the school year, along with decreases in contact tracing and changing guarantine recommendations over time.¹⁷ 251

252 CDC-INFO agents managed inquiries several ways. The high proportion of escalations to subject 253 matter experts related to the high-risk/disability theme was likely because students and staff at increased risk or with a disability may have unique situations¹⁸ that are unable to be fully addressed by general 254 255 guidance. For prevention—cleaning inquiries, the high proportion of escalations may indicate a need for 256 improved guidance on the website or through prepared response materials to respond to these inquiries. Additionally, many inquiries required no CDC action, such as those focused on school closure, which 257 were not decisions made by CDC.¹⁹ The high frequency of inquiries that did not require CDC action 258 259 highlights potential misunderstandings of CDC's role during a public health emergency.

260

261 Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, this study included only a portion of the inquiries directed toward CDC; therefore, it may not be fully generalizable to local public health agencies or be representative of the questions and complaints the public had. Second, this study did not examine the relationship between the inquiries and changes in K-12 guidance, which would require reviewing considerably more inquiries and conducting more complex analyses. Third, this study did not compare

Finally, this study only focused on COVID-19. Additional studies of this population during other public health events would help to clarify how needs may change by public health threat. For example, a radiological event may raise different questions than an outbreak of influenza or a novel pathogen response.

271

272 Conclusions

273 Public health officials should be prepared to respond to the changing informational needs of the public 274 during emergency responses and to provide both general information through websites and detailed 275 information for unique situations and settings, including K-12 schools. In future responses, public health 276 officials should proactively be prepared to respond to questions about quarantine and isolation and to 277 address various topics as the emergency changes over time. Public health officials should also be 278 prepared for complaints about school closures and to dedicate subject matter experts to responding to 279 some questions, such as those related to high-risk/disability, cleaning guidance, and special settings. 280 Public health preparation and response can help empower individuals to take steps to protect their health 281 and their communities. Additional research is needed on an ongoing basis to better facilitate public 282 health officials' ability to rapidly adapt materials for the needs of their communities, tailoring materials 283 to specific populations and responses. 284 **Disclaimer** 285 286 The findings and conclusions of this article are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the 287 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 288

289 Funding

290 The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

291

292 Declaration of Conflicting Interests

293 The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or294 publication of this article.

296 **References**

- 297 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC museum COVID-19 timeline. Updated August
- 298 16, 2022. Accessed February 10, 2023. https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html
- 299 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC-INFO. Updated November 28, 2022.
- 300 Accessed February 10, 2023. https://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/index.html
- 301 3. Altman DG. *Practical Statistics for Medical Research*. Chapman & Hall/CRC Press; 1999.
- Gupta S, Smith L, Diakiw A. Avoidance of COVID-19 for children and adolescents and isolation
 precautions. *Pediatr Clin North Am.* 2021;68(5):1103-1118. doi:10.1016/j.pcl.2021.05.011
- 304 5. Strydhorst NA, Landrum AR. Charting cognition: mapping public understanding of COVID-19.
- 305 Public Underst Sci. 2022;31(5):534-552. doi:10.1177/09636625221078462
- Mosby LG, Ellington SR, Forhan SE, et al. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's
 maternal health response to 2009 H1N1 influenza. *Am J Obstet Gynecol*. 2011;204(6 Suppl 1): S7-S12.
 doi:10.1016/j.ajog.2011.02.057
- 309 7. Ellington S, Perez M, Morof D, et al. Addressing maternal health during CDC's Ebola response
 310 in the United States. *J Womens Health (Larchmt)*. 2017;26(11):1141-1145. doi:10.1089/jwh.2017.6719
- 8. Gayatri M, Puspitasari MD. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on family well-being: a
- 312 literature review. Fam J Alex Va. 2023;31(4):606-613. doi:10.1177/10664807221131006
- 313 9. Jorgensen CM, Lewis CA, Liu J. An analysis of hepatitis C virus-related public inquiries from
- 314 health professionals: 2009-2010. Clin Infect Dis. 2012;55(Suppl 1):S54-S57. doi:10.1093/cid/cis369
- 315 10. Sell TK, Watson C, Meyer D, et al. Zika inquiries made to the CDC-INFO system, December
- 316 2015–September 2017. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 2020;26(5):1022-1024. doi:10.3201/eid2605.181694
- 317 11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Zika cases in the United States. Updated May 15,
- 318 2024. Accessed June 17, 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/zika/zika-cases-us/index.html
- 319 12. Eldridge CC, Hampton D, Marfell J. Communication during crisis. Nurs Manage.
- 320 2020;51(8):50-53. doi:10.1097/01.NUMA.0000688976.29383.dc
- 321 13. Whaley GL, Pfefferbaum B. Parental challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic: psychological
- 322 outcomes and risk and protective factors. *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2023;25(4):165-174.
- 323 doi:10.1007/s11920-023-01412-0
- 14. Dawson P, Worrell MC, Malone S, et al. Modifications to student quarantine policies in K-12
- 325 schools implementing multiple COVID-19 prevention strategies restores in-person education without
- increasing SARS-CoV-2 transmission risk, January–March 2021. *PLoS One*. 2022;17(10):e0266292.
- 327 doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0266292

- 328 15. Jenco M. CDC changes recommended distance between students to 3 ft. while masked. AAP
- 329 News. March 19, 2021. Accessed June 17, 2024. https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/7908/CDC-
- 330 <u>changes-recommended-distance-between-students</u>
- 16. Merod A, Arundel K. As national COVID-19 emergency ends, a look back on the virus' impact
- 332 on schools. K-12 Dive. May 11, 2023. Accessed July 31, 2024. https://www.k12dive.com/news/national-
- 333 emergency-ends-COVID-19-timeline/650009
- 17. Zou K, Hayashi M, Simon S, Eisenberg JNS. Trade-off between quarantine length and
- compliance to optimize COVID-19 control. *Epidemiology*. 2023;34(4):589-600.
- 336 doi:10.1097/EDE.000000000001619
- 18. Blad E. Special education during the pandemic, in charts. *EducationWeek*. October 17, 2022.
- 338 Accessed July 31, 2024. <u>https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/special-education-during-the-</u>
- 339 pandemic-in-charts/2022/10
- 340 19. Zviedrite N, Hodis JD, Jahan F, Gao H, Uzicanin A. COVID-19-associated school closures and
- 341 related efforts to sustain education and subsidized meal programs, United States, February 18–June 30,
- 342 2020. PLoS One. 2021;16(9):e0248925. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0248925

343 *Table 1. Time frames for analysis and alignment with COVID-19 pandemic events affecting K-12*

344 schools, United States, 2020-2022

Pandemic timeline for analysis	Selected major pandemic events ^a
Time 1: January 17–August 8, 2020	January 20, 2020: First US person diagnosed with COVID-19
	March 15, 2020: School closures begin
Time 2: August 9, 2020–March 1, 2021	December 11, 2020: COVID-19 vaccine for people aged ≥16 years recommended
Time 3: March 2–September 23, 2021	March 19, 2021: Reduced physical distancing recommendation in schools to 3 feet
	May 2021: 52% of fourth graders were enrolled in in-person, full-time learning ¹⁶
	May 10, 2021: COVID-19 vaccines expanded to adolescents aged 12-15 years
	June 1, 2021: Delta variant becomes dominant
Time 4: September 24, 2021–April 17, 2022	October 29, 2021: COVID-19 vaccines expanded to children aged 5-11 years
	November 26, 2021: Omicron is a variant of concern
	December 27, 2021: Shortened isolation to 5 days + face masking for an additional 5 days
	March 3, 2022: COVID-19 community levels introduced
Time 5: April 18–November 8, 2022	June 18 2022: COVID-19 vaccines expanded to children aged 6 months to 5 years
	November 8, 2022: End of data collection

345 *Abbreviation: K-12, kindergarten through grade 12.*

^a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC museum COVID-19 timeline.¹

348 *Table 2.* Significance of theme frequency for K-12–related inquiries received by CDC during the

349 *COVID-19 pandemic, by period, United States^a*

Theme	Total frequency (T1-T4)	Time 1 (T1: January 17– August 8, 2020), frequency (% of T1)	Time 2 (T2: August 9, 2020–March 1, 2021), frequency (% of T2)	Time 3 (T3: March 2– September 23, 2021), frequency (% of T3)	Time 4 (T4: September 24, 2021– April 17, 2022), frequency (% of T4)	χ² value (<i>df</i>) [P value] ^b
Closure	92	49 (10.4)	21 (3.4)	18 (2.6)	4 (0.7)	11 (3) [.01]
General guidance	483	192 (40.8)	143 (23.1)	96 (14.0)	52 (9.5)	27 (3) [<.001]
High- risk/disability	63	19 (4.0)	22 (3.6)	15 (2.2)	7 (1.3)	2 (3) [.48]
Prevention— cleaning	47	14 (3.0)	16 (2.6)	12 (1.7)	5 (0.9)	1 (3) [.75]
Prevention— distance	66	14 (3.0)	18 (2.9)	32 (4.7)	2 (0.4)	4 (3) [.29]
Prevention—face masks	290	20 (4.2)	47 (7.6)	177 (25.7)	46 (8.4)	25 (3) [<.001]
Prevention— vaccines	94	0°	31 (5.0)	45 (6.5)	18 (3.3)	2 (2) ^c [.45]
Quarantine and isolation	877	75 (15.9)	254 (41.0)	209 (30.4)	339 (61.7)	30 (3) [<.001]
Special settings	149	34 (7.2)	42 (6.8)	45 (6.5)	28 (5.1)	0 (3) [.93]
Testing	96	15 (3.2)	15 (2.4)	31 (4.5)	35 (6.4)	3 (3) [.48]
Travel	70	39 (8.3)	10 (1.6)	8 (1.2)	13 (2.4)	10 (3) [.02]
Total	2327	471 (20.2)	619 (26.6)	688 (29.6)	549 (23.6)	

350 Abbreviations: CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; K-12, kindergarten through grade 12.

^a Because of a low frequency of inquiries (n = 112) during T5 (April 18–November 8, 2022), this period

352 was removed from the χ^2 comparison.

353 ^b Pearson χ^2 goodness-of-fit tests were conducted to compare differences between frequencies of

354 categorical variables, with P < .05 considered significant.

^c No inquiries were expected for T1 related to vaccines because the COVID-19 vaccine did not become

available until December 11, 2020, with the first vaccines only available to those aged ≥ 16 years.¹

357 *Table 3.* Significance of theme frequency for K-12–related inquiries received by CDC during the

358 COVID-19 pandemic, by how CDC-INFO agents responded to inquiries, United States, January 17,

359 *2020, to November 8, 2022^a*

	Total		Prepared		No CDC	
Theme	frequency, no.	Website, no. (%)	response, no. (%)	Escalation, ^a no. (%)	action,b no. (%)	χ ² (<i>df</i>) [<i>P</i> value] ^c
Closure	93	6 (6.5)	20 (21.5)	20 (21.5)	47 (50.5)	40 (3) [<.001]
General guidance	500	48 (9.6)	178 (35.6)	115 (23.0)	159 (31.8)	16 (3) [.001]
High- risk/disability	66	9 (13.6)	20 (30.3)	24 (36.4)	13 (19.7)	12 (3) [.01]
Prevention—	49	8 (16.3)	14 (28.6)	21 (42.9)	6 (12.2)	24 (3) [<.001]
Prevention—	66	9 (13.6)	26 (39.4)	16 (24.2)	15 (22.7)	13 (3) [.005]
Prevention—	295	32 (10.8)	92 (31.2)	75 (25.4)	96 (32.5)	12 (3) [.01]
Prevention—	107	12 (11.2)	45 (42.1)	22 (20.6)	28 (26.2)	20 (3) [< 001]
Quarantine and isolation	944	184 (19.5)	470 (49.8)	117 (12.4)	173 (18.3)	35 (3) [<.001]
Special settings	150	21 (14.0)	53 (35.3)	45 (30.0)	31 (20.7)	11 (3) [.01]
Testing	98	12 (12.2)	43 (43.9)	24 (24.5)	19 (19.4)	23 (3) [< 001]
Travel	71	14 (19.7)	25 (35.2)	18 (25.4)	14 (19.7)	6 (3) [.11]
Total	2439	355 (14.6)	986 (40.4)	497 (20.4)	601 (24.6)	

360 Abbreviations: CDC, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; K-12, kindergarten through grade 12.

^a Includes the following disposition categories: clarification (email only), escalation, program referral,

362 program response, and transferred.

^b Includes the following disposition categories: agent terminated, call dropped, external referral, for your

364 information, and publication request.

 $^{\circ}$ Pearson χ^2 goodness-of-fit tests were conducted to compare differences between frequencies of

366 categorical variables, with P < .05 considered significant.

367

- 369 *Figure 1.* Frequency of themes (N = 2439) for K-12–related inquiries received by the Centers for
- 370 Disease Control and Prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic, United States, January 17, 2020, to
- 371 November 8, 2022.



373 Abbreviation: K-12, kindergarten through grade 12

- 374 *Figure 2.* Frequency of questions versus complaints (N = 2439) by theme for K-12–related inquiries
- 375 received by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic, United

376 *States, January 17, 2020, to November 8, 2022.*





- 379 Pearson χ^2 goodness-of-fit tests were conducted to compare differences between frequencies of
- 380 categorical variables, with P < .05 considered significant. Only the general guidance theme was not
- 381 significant.