

## **New Data Illustrate COVID-19 Pandemic Negatively Impacted Infection Preventionists' Mental and Physical Health**

*First-of-its-kind study suggests hospitals and healthcare systems should fix system issues and invest in workplace wellness to enhance quality and safety of patient care*

**Arlington, Va., July 14, 2022** – Findings from a first-of-its-kind [study](#) published today in the *American Journal of Infection Control* (AJIC) suggest that infection preventionists experienced worsening mental and physical health as a result of stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, which evaluated infection preventionists' health, well-being and their association with workplace wellness programs, highlights a need to fix hospital and healthcare facilities' system issues that cause burnout and poor health, and to enhance workplace wellness programs and culture.

Infection preventionists are responsible for reducing the risk of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) in hospitals and other health facilities, including long-term care and outpatient surgery centers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these professionals have had to manage rapidly changing guidance, dramatic increases in HAIs and workload, and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and staff, among other challenges.

“Infection preventionists have been actively engaged in managing the COVID-19 pandemic for more than two years, yet there hasn't been a study evaluating their health and well-being and how these are associated with workplace wellness programs and culture,” said Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, chief wellness officer and College of Nursing dean at The Ohio State University and lead author on the study. “This is important information because poor health and well-being among infection prevention professionals not only adversely impacts them, but also negatively impacts the quality and safety of healthcare.”

Dr. Melnyk and colleagues developed a survey exploring infection preventionists' mental/physical health and lifestyle behaviors during the pandemic, and the associations of these factors with individuals' professional roles, perceived workplace wellness support, shift length and race/ethnicity. The survey

was emailed to a random sample of members of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), the leading organization for infection preventionists.

Responses from 926 professionals show that infection preventionists' physical and mental health were negatively impacted during the pandemic, and that individuals' professional roles, the level of wellness support they received in the workplace and shift lengths were primary factors. Specific findings include:

- High numbers of respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected their mental (74%) and/or physical (60%) health.
- Rates of depression, anxiety and burnout among survey respondents were 21.5%, 29.8% and 65.2%, respectively.
- Most respondents said the pandemic negatively impacted their sleep (77%), physical activity (64.5%) and healthy eating (61.1%).
- Front-line practitioners (74.1%) and infection prevention administrators/directors (76.3%) had more negative mental health impacts than peers in other roles (e.g., educator, researcher, public health practitioner).
- Infection preventionists working 9-11+ hours per day were more likely to report worsening physical/mental health during the pandemic as compared to their peers who worked  $\leq 8$  hours per day.
- Infection preventionists with organizational wellness support were less likely to report negative mental and physical impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study authors suggest that healthcare organizations take multiple steps to better protect the health and safety of infection preventionists, including fixing system issues known to cause burnout and poor health among staff (e.g., short staffing), implementing targeted interventions to promote resilience and self-care and instituting shorter shift lengths.

“Infection preventionists have been instrumental in enabling healthcare facilities to deliver safe care during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Linda Dickey, RN, MPH, CIC, FAPIC, 2022 APIC president. “The fact that so many are exhibiting symptoms of burnout is concerning and should prompt employers to adopt programs to promote well-being in order to retain these highly skilled professionals.”

### **About APIC**

*Founded in 1972, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) is the leading association for infection preventionists and epidemiologists. With more than 15,000 members, APIC advances the science and practice of infection prevention and control. APIC carries out its mission through research, advocacy, and patient safety; education, credentialing, and certification; and fostering development of the infection prevention and control workforce of the future. Together with our members and partners, we are working toward a safer world through the prevention of infection. Join us and learn more at [apic.org](https://www.apic.org).*

## **About AJIC**

*As the official peer-reviewed journal of APIC, The American Journal of Infection Control ([AJIC](#)) is the foremost resource on infection control, epidemiology, infectious diseases, quality management, occupational health, and disease prevention. Published by [Elsevier](#), AJIC also publishes infection control guidelines from APIC and the CDC. AJIC is included in Index Medicus and CINAHL. Visit AJIC at [ajicjournal.org](#).*

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

“Associations among infection prevention professionals’ mental/physical health, lifestyle behaviors, shift length, race, and workplace wellness support during COVID-19,” by Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD; Andreanna Pavan Hsieh, MPH; Devin A. Jopp, EdD; and Sara Miller, MBA, was published online in *AJIC* on July 14, 2022. The article may be found online at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajic.2022.04.004>

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