



HERO School Testing: April – May 2021 Update

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The [Utah Health and Economic Recovery Outreach \(HERO\) Project](#) began in May 2020 as a collaborative statewide testing and analysis project to understand the community-based spread of Covid-19. The goal of the HERO Project is to collect and utilize high-quality local data to help inform decision-makers seeking to guide Utah’s citizens and economy through a safe return to normalcy. Beginning in March 2021, the project team is publishing update reports on community testing, impacts of Covid-19 on Utah businesses and consumers, school testing, work in long-term care facilities, and vaccine uptake, impact, and implications. This report focuses on the [HERO Project’s work in K-12 schools](#) and serves as an update to the [Key Findings in School Testing Report published March 23, 2021](#) and the [March-April 2021 Update published April 15, 2021](#).

Background on School Testing

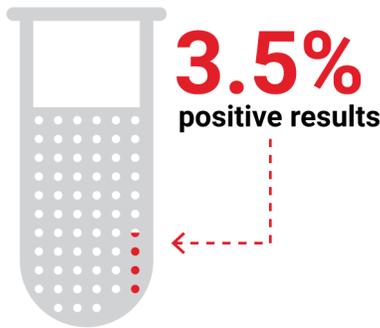
The HERO Project began school testing in October 2020 and has continued through May 2021, conducting tests for over 3,600 participants representing over 100 schools. The primary goal of school-based testing is to provide convenient access to Covid-19 testing to students, faculty, and staff to enhance safety in school communities by reducing transmission. By increasing testing, schools can better identify both symptomatic and asymptomatic cases, reducing the occurrence of school outbreaks that prevent in-person learning.

Testing Results

Between October 2020 and May 7, 2021, students had a higher rate of positive tests than did staff and teachers, but both groups were relatively low.

students

2,425 students tested



staff & teachers

1,262 staff & teachers tested



103

participating
schools



5,982

PCR tests



3,687

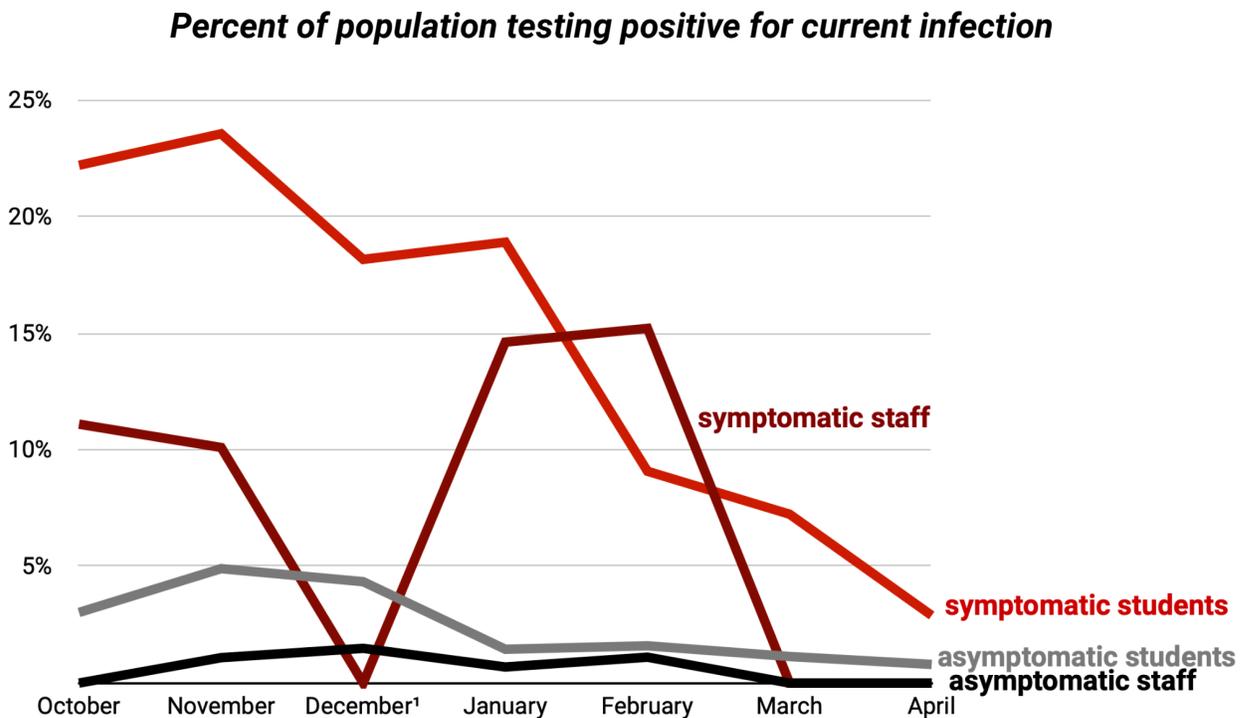
participating students
& school staff

April 2021 Testing Results

In the month of April, the HERO project performed 460 tests on 235 individual participants from 57 schools, on both students and staff, with students receiving nearly 90% of the tests. No staff members tested positive during this reporting period. Overall, students had a 1.0% positivity rate, and symptomatic students continued to test positive at higher rates (2.9%) than asymptomatic students (0.8%).

Rates of Infection Across Time

Intensive testing has taken place every month since October, with the exception of December due to the winter break limiting the amount of time students and staff were at their schools. Positivity rates have generally decreased since testing began, a trend that has continued to hold into Spring 2021. This applies for both students and staff, and both those with and without symptoms, as shown in the figure below.



¹ December testing included only the first two weeks due to Winter Break, decreasing the sample size as compared to other months.

Additional School-Based Projects and Findings

Surveying High School Students

In a collaboration with Granite School District, Salt Lake City School District, and an additional high school in the area, the HERO team surveyed high school students about the impact of the pandemic and their behaviors related to it. Over 1500 students—approximately 6% of the total student body in these schools—completed the survey. Among respondents, 46% reported that they were currently participating in an in-person learning model.

Preliminary findings indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has substantially burdened high school students. Overall, 11% of respondents reported having tested positive for the virus and 26% reported a positive test for a household member. Forty percent of respondents reported having to quarantine at least once, and 39% of these quarantines were due to an in-school exposure. Further analysis is ongoing and will include exploration of the influence of school learning model on personal history of infection, quarantine, and out-of-school behaviors.

Analysis of Covid-19 Testing Policy

Along with colleagues from the Utah Department of Health, United States Public Health Service, and Utah State Board of Education, the HERO team recently completed an evaluation of two state testing policies for schools: [Test to Stay](#) and [Test to Play](#). These programs were designed to help sustain in-person learning and extracurricular activities in Utah schools by guiding school testing strategies and responses. A publication is forthcoming and will be reviewed in a future report.

Investigating Vaccination Plans Among Students & Staff

In addition, the HERO team has begun a series of focus groups with educators and high school students to explore their attitudes, plans, and potential barriers to vaccination. More information on the findings of these focus groups will be described in a future report.

Next Steps

Throughout the remainder of the academic year, the HERO Project will continue working to analyze and report on Covid-19 transmission in school settings, while also working to pursue additional projects of particular interest to school leaders and state decision-makers. In future reporting, the HERO team will share findings from the final weeks of staff and student testing, further results from the survey of high school students, the Test to Stay and Test to Play publication, and focus groups on vaccination plans, as well as a final summary overviewing the HERO Project's work in K-12 schools.

Acknowledgments

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This report was developed by the Sorenson Impact Center at the University of Utah's David Eccles School of Business in partnership with the HERO Project leadership. Sorenson Impact works with public, nonprofit, and private sector stakeholders to develop, structure, and mobilize capital for innovative and data-driven approaches to difficult social and public health challenges. This report was created by Austin Hendrickson and Allison Nicholson and designed by Alicia Pangman.

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