

1 **Decreased risk of non-influenza respiratory infection after influenza B**
2 **virus infection in children**

3

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38 **ABSTRACT**

39 Previous studies suggest influenza virus infection may provide temporary non-
40 specific immunity and hence lower the risk of non-influenza respiratory virus
41 infection. In a randomized controlled trial of influenza vaccination, 1330 children
42 were followed-up in 2009-2011. Respiratory swabs were collected when they
43 reported acute respiratory illness, and tested against influenza and other
44 respiratory viruses. We used Poisson regression to compare the incidence of
45 non-influenza respiratory virus infection before and after influenza virus
46 infection. Based on 52 children with influenza B virus infection, the incidence
47 rate ratio of non-influenza respiratory virus infection after influenza virus
48 infection was 0.47 (95% confidence interval: 0.27, 0.82) compared with before
49 infection. Simulation suggested this incidence rate ratio was 0.87 if the
50 temporary protection did not exist. We identified a decreased risk of non-
51 influenza respiratory virus infection after influenza B virus infection in children.
52 Further investigation is needed to determine if this decreased risk could be
53 attributed to temporary non-specific immunity acquired from influenza virus
54 infection.

55

56 **INTRODUCTION**

57 Virus interference describes the phenomenon that an infection for a pathogen
58 may have impact on subsequent infection of other pathogens. It has been
59 observed in many diseases for decades, and firstly identified in virologic studies
60 (1-4). Ecological studies usually suggested virus interference by negative
61 association between incidences of diseases, including measles and whooping
62 cough (5). This is particularly studied for respiratory virus, with focus on
63 interference between influenza and other respiratory virus, including
64 respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) (6-8), parainfluenza virus (9), adenovirus (9),
65 rhinoviruses (10, 11). This association has also been observed among other non-
66 influenza respiratory viruses, such as between rhinoviruses and adenoviruses
67 (12), and between RSV and rhinoviruses (13). However, positive association
68 between incidences of disease is also possible, such as the change of testing
69 capacity (14), or population-level interventions such as social distancing
70 measure that prevented spread for respiratory viruses (15), so that the
71 observed number of respiratory virus infections increased or decreased
72 simultaneously.

73
74 One potential mechanism for the negative association between incidence of
75 disease was that the infection of a virus may provide a temporary non-specific
76 immunity against infection of another virus (16, 17). If this is true, then
77 vaccination against a virus may decrease the risk of natural infection of that
78 virus, which would otherwise provide temporary non-specific immunity against
79 other viruses, and hence increase the risk of infection of other viruses. One
80 example is influenza and other respiratory viruses, which was reported in a

81 vaccine trial in 2008/09 (16). Live attenuated influenza vaccines (18) and live
82 attenuated polio vaccines (19, 20) have been reported to provide temporary
83 non-specific protection against other infections, presumably through the same
84 mechanism (21).

85

86 Here, we analysed data from a randomized controlled trial of influenza virus
87 vaccination in 2009/10, with follow-up to identify virologically confirmed
88 influenza and other respiratory virus infections (22). We compared the incidence
89 of non-influenza respiratory viruses infection before and after influenza B virus
90 infection.

91

92 **METHODS**

93 *Study design*

94 In 2009/10 we conducted a community-based randomized controlled trial to
95 evaluate the direct and indirect benefits of influenza vaccination
96 (ClinicalTrials.gov NCT00792051). We enrolled households that each included at
97 least one child aged 6-17 years of age. In each household, one child was
98 randomized to receive either a single dose of trivalent inactivated influenza
99 vaccination (0.5 mL of VAXIGRIP; Sanofi Pasteur) or saline placebo (22).
100 Telephone calls were made every two weeks to monitor for any acute upper
101 respiratory tract infections. Home visits were triggered when any household
102 member reported presence of any of the following 2 symptoms: fever $\geq 37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$,
103 chills, headache, sore throat, cough, presence of phlegm, coryza, or myalgia.
104 Additional visits were conducted at 3-day intervals until acute illnesses resolved.
105 In each home visit, nasal and throat swab specimens were collected from all

106 household members, regardless of presence of illness, for laboratory testing.

107 Participants were followed-up with the same design for 2010/11.

108

109 All participants aged 18 years and older gave written informed consent. Proxy
110 written consent from parents or legal guardians was obtained for participants,
111 with additional written assent from those aged 8 to 17 years. The study protocol
112 was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Hong Kong.

113

114 Study participants who met the eligibility criteria were randomly assigned to
115 either the trivalent inactivated vaccine (TIV) or placebo group, following a 3:2
116 allocation ratio. To maintain blinding for both households and study nurses, a
117 trained nurse who was not involved in administering the vaccines repackaged
118 TIV and placebo into identical, numbered syringes. A research assistant, without
119 access to the randomization list, assigned unique identification numbers to the
120 participating households based on the order in which they attended. These
121 identification numbers were then matched to the vaccine packages. The
122 allocation of TIV or placebo remained concealed to the households, study nurses,
123 and laboratory staff, and was disclosed to the investigators only upon completion
124 of the follow-up period.

125

126 ***Laboratory Methods***

127 Pooled nose and throat swab samples were stored at -80°C, and tested for
128 influenza A and B by reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR),
129 using standard methods as described elsewhere (16). The swab samples

130 collected before February 2011 were also tested for 19 non-influenza respiratory
131 viruses by the ResPlex II Plus multiplex array as described elsewhere (16).

132

133 ***Statistical Methods***

134 Since almost all (>98%) non-influenza respiratory virus infections in our study
135 occurred in children (age 0-17), adult household members (age ≥ 18) were
136 excluded in our analysis. Influenza virus infections were defined as a positive
137 PCR result on testing of one or more pooled nasal and throat specimen collected
138 from that individual. We focused on children with influenza B virus infections
139 since this type was prevalent during the study period and the trivalent
140 inactivated influenza vaccine was estimated to have 66% efficacy against
141 influenza virus infections in our trial (22). We considered the follow-up ended at
142 February 28, 2011, or earlier if loss of follow-up, since the swab samples
143 collected after that day were not tested against non-influenza respiratory
144 viruses.

145

146 Among those individuals with influenza virus infection, we used a self-controlled
147 approach to estimate the incidence rate ratio (IRR) of non-influenza respiratory
148 infections after and before influenza virus infection. Given that there were
149 seasonal patterns of influenza and other non-influenza respiratory viruses, we
150 used a piecewise Poisson regression model, that assumed the risk was constant
151 in each week but may differ between weeks, with an offset term for the person-
152 time before and after infections. This approach was used to address the potential
153 individual differences such as differences in reporting after presence of
154 symptoms, health status and heterogeneity in exposure (23).

155

156 To validate this approach was robust to the reporting difference between
157 individuals with or without influenza virus infections, we conducted the same
158 analysis on the individuals without influenza virus infection, by randomly
159 imputing a 'virtual' infection time from the observed time of influenza virus
160 infection in the data, to estimate the 'null' IRR among individuals without
161 influenza virus infection and hence without temporal protection. As sensitivity
162 analyses, we conducted the same simulations, but randomly imputing a 'virtual'
163 infection time from the observed time of influenza virus infection in the data, but
164 added 3 months and 6 months (so that there should be no temporal protection)
165 to determine if the impact of different timing of influenza seasons when
166 estimating the 'null' IRR. Statistical analyses were conducted using R version
167 3.5.2 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria).

168

169 **RESULTS**

170 From August 2009 through February 2010 we enrolled 796 households, each of
171 which included one child that was randomly allocated to receive influenza
172 vaccination or placebo, and an additional 534 household contacts aged between
173 1 and 17 years. One child withdrew from the study after randomization but
174 before the intervention was administered, and 13 of the 795 children who
175 received the intervention did not complete the study. Other participants were
176 follow-up through October 2010, but 193 households did not join the second-
177 year of the study. To account for this, Poisson regression with offset of the
178 duration of follow-up was used.

179

180 We detected 13/479 (3%), 23/317 (7%) and 16/534 (3%) PCR-confirmed
181 influenza B virus infections in children randomized to vaccination, placebo, and
182 child household contacts, respectively. During the study period, we observed the
183 following non-influenza respiratory virus infections: rhinovirus,
184 metapneumovirus, coronavirus, parainfluenza virus, respiratory syncytial virus,
185 and adenovirus (Table 1). Rhinovirus was responsible for over half of the non-
186 influenza respiratory virus infections, accounting for 70% (310/448) of cases.
187 Among children who were randomized to receive either the vaccine or placebo,
188 as per the study design (Appendix Table 1), the incidence of influenza virus
189 infection in the placebo group (0.06 per person-year; 95% confidence interval
190 (CI): 0.04, 0.10) was greater than that in the TIV group (0.02 per person-year;
191 95% CI: 0.01, 0.04; $p=0.005$). This result indicated a vaccine effectiveness against
192 PCR-confirmed influenza of 63% (95% CI: 26% to 81%).

193
194 Monthly incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus infections for the children
195 who received influenza vaccination or placebo are shown in Figure 1. While non-
196 influenza virus activity (blue line) was stable over the year, we noted that the
197 largest difference in the incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus infections
198 between vaccine recipients and placebo recipients was observed in May 2010,
199 i.e. 1-2 months after the peak of influenza B virus activity (black line) in the
200 community (March-April 2010). Overall, the incidence of non-influenza virus
201 infection for children who received influenza vaccination was slightly higher
202 than for those in the placebo group, but the difference was not statistically
203 significant (incidence rate ratio (IRR): 1.18; 95% CI: 0.92, 1.51; p -value: 0.20).

204

205 Incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus infections before and after influenza
206 virus infection were 1.20 (95% confidence interval (CI): 0.81, 1.78) and 0.56
207 (95% CI: 0.37, 0.84) per person-year respectively. The incidence of non-influenza
208 respiratory virus infections in these two groups were much higher than in those
209 without influenza virus infection (incidence rate: 0.28; 95% CI: 0.25, 0.31). As
210 described earlier, we hypothesized that the lower incidence of non-influenza
211 respiratory virus infection in individuals without influenza virus infection was
212 due to difference in reporting behavior (mean episode of ILI reported: 2.63 and
213 0.86 for individuals with and without influenza virus infection respectively).
214 Therefore, we used a self-controlled approach to test if this association was
215 robust to such differences.

216
217 Based on those individuals with influenza virus infection, the IRR of non-
218 influenza respiratory virus infection after and before influenza virus infection
219 was 0.54 (95% CI: 0.30, 0.963, p-value: 0.037), suggesting a temporal protection
220 against non-influenza respiratory virus infection after influenza virus infection.
221 In the validation analysis with 10000 replications by randomly selecting 200,000
222 individuals (with replacement) without influenza virus infection and hence no
223 temporal protection, and randomly assigning the 'infection time' based on the
224 observed infection time, this 'null' IRR was 0.976 . We repeated the same
225 analysis, by randomly selecting 200,000 individuals (with replacement) without
226 influenza virus infection, and randomly assigning the 'infection time' based on
227 the observed infection time, but added 3 months and 6 months, and these 'null'
228 IRR were 1.035 and 1.024. Both 'null' IRRs were higher than the observed one,

229 indicating that the decreased risk could not be explained by reporting differences
230 alone.

231

232 **DISCUSSION**

233 In this study, we used a self-controlled analysis to identify a reduction in the
234 incidence rate of non-influenza respiratory virus infections (IRR: 0.54; 95% CI:
235 0.30, 0.963) after PCR-confirmed influenza B virus infections. In a validation
236 analysis, we estimated that among those individuals without influenza virus
237 infection and hence without temporal protection, the 'null' IRR was 0.976. We
238 conducted different sensitivity analyses to estimate this 'null' IRR, and the
239 estimates ranged from 1.024 to 1.035. Hence, these results suggested this
240 difference cannot be explained by reporting differences among individuals with
241 or without influenza virus infections.

242

243 This decreased risk of non-influenza respiratory virus infection after influenza
244 virus infection is consistent with the potential for temporary non-specific
245 immunity, due to the innate immune response that is triggered by one viral
246 infection and protects against all viral infections for a short time (24). We
247 postulate that the risk of non-influenza respiratory virus infections after
248 influenza virus infections was decreased due to temporary non-specific
249 immunity after the influenza virus infection.

250

251 The reduced risk of non-influenza respiratory virus infection following influenza
252 virus infection observed in our study at the individual level aligns with findings
253 in ecological studies conducted at the population level. For instance, some

254 studies have noted that influenza outbreaks may postpone the respiratory
255 syncytial virus season (6), and that there is asynchronous circulation between
256 influenza and rhinovirus (10, 11). Our results support the inverse relationship
257 between the incidence of influenza virus and non-influenza respiratory virus
258 infections observed in ecological studies, suggesting that this relationship is not
259 solely attributable to surveillance bias (11). Gaining a deeper understanding of
260 this phenomenon is crucial for accurately characterizing the epidemiological
261 dynamics of influenza and other respiratory viruses. Such knowledge may also
262 contribute to enhancing disease forecasting models (11). During the COVID-19
263 pandemic, there has been a significant decrease in the activity of certain
264 respiratory viruses, including the influenza virus. However, this reduction is
265 likely due to the implementation of stringent public health measures, such as
266 lockdowns, which have decreased the transmission of various pathogens, rather
267 than being a result of virus interference.

268
269 In our study, we observed a higher, albeit not statistically significant, risk of non-
270 influenza respiratory virus infections among vaccinated participants compared
271 to non-vaccinated participants throughout the study period. This risk increased
272 more than fourfold in a smaller influenza vaccination trial conducted in Hong
273 Kong during 2008/09 (16), but to a lesser degree in a test-negative design study
274 among army personnel in the United States (25). Our analysis indicates that this
275 phenomenon likely resulted from the absence of temporary nonspecific
276 immunity following influenza virus infection, such as the innate immune
277 response to infection (24). This hypothesis aligns with the observation that the
278 largest difference in the incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus between

279 participants in the vaccine group and the placebo group occurred in May 2010,
280 approximately one month after the peak of influenza B (Figure 1). It is plausible
281 that receiving the influenza vaccine may directly increase the risk of non-
282 influenza respiratory virus infection due to an unknown biological mechanism,
283 such as enhancing immunity against influenza while concurrently reducing
284 immunity against other respiratory viruses.

285

286 Our study has some limitations. First, we combined several respiratory viruses
287 together, to form a group of 'non-influenza respiratory viruses' infections, due to
288 a lack of sample size. However, most literature suggested that virus interference
289 between influenza virus and various non-influenza respiratory virus infection
290 were similar (6). Second, we only observed one PCR-confirmed non-influenza
291 respiratory virus infection in adults. Therefore, we were unable to examine
292 whether virus interference might also occur in adults, although it may be
293 expected that the effect is smaller because the risk of influenza virus infection
294 and non-influenza respiratory virus infections are also lower than children.
295 Third, we cannot rule out the potential of other unidentified confounders in
296 association between the incidence of influenza virus and non-influenza
297 respiratory virus infection. For example, there could be measurement bias that
298 participants were more likely to report their first illness episode, but not the
299 subsequent episodes. Because the reporting frequency among individuals
300 differed by 3-fold, we adopted a self-controlled approach that compared the
301 incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus infection before and after an
302 influenza virus infection (23, 26). Fourth, we used piecewise Poisson regression
303 that assumed the risk within a week was the same, but it could differ between

304 weeks, to account for the seasonality of influenza and non-influenza respiratory
305 viruses. While we could divide the period to a smaller scale like day, the number
306 of events in our study did not allow for smaller scale. Finally, the self-controlled
307 approach we use could not determine the duration of temporary non-specific
308 immunity, we noted that the hypothesized potential temporary immunity
309 induced by influenza infection is short-term, a relatively short post-influenza
310 infection window would be most relevant.

311

312 In conclusion, we found a reduction in risk of infection of non-influenza
313 respiratory virus after influenza B virus infection. This is consistent with
314 temporary non-specific immunity which is one of the biological mechanisms
315 proposed to explain virus interference at the ecological level.

316

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331

332 **Potential conflicts of interest**

333 BJC consults for AstraZeneca, Fosun Pharma, GlaxoSmithKline, Haleon, Moderna,
334 Pfizer, Roche, and Sanofi Pasteur. The authors report no other potential conflicts
335 of interest.

336

337 **Data availability statement**

338 The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in
339 <https://github.com/bcowling/pediatric-vaccine-trial/tree/master/data>

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410

411

412

413 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

414 **Figure 1.** Monthly incidence of non-influenza respiratory virus infections for the

415 study period. Panel A: The red and orange points and lines indicated the

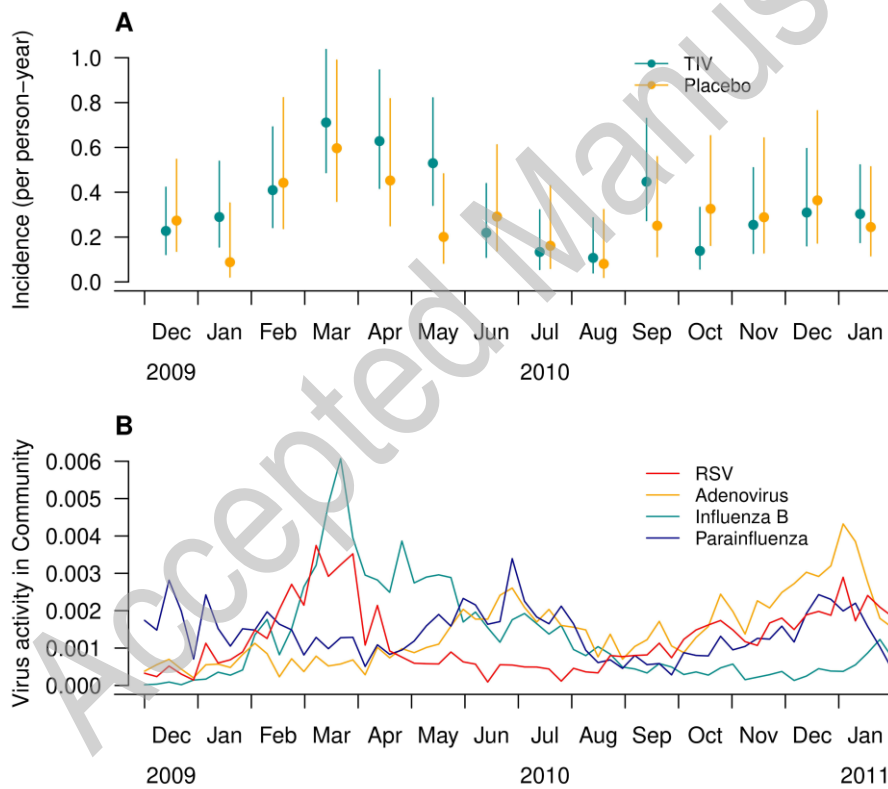
416 incidence and the corresponding 95% confidence interval of non-influenza

417 respiratory virus infection for children in vaccine (TIV) and placebo groups

418 respectively. Panel B: The red, orange, deep green and purple line showed the

419 RSV, Adenovirus, influenza B and parainfluenza virus activity based on

420 surveillance data.



421

Table 1. Incidence rates of respiratory virus detection by Reverse-Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction and X-Tag Multiplex Assay by infection status of influenza B virus infection

	Before influenza B virus infection			After influenza B virus infection			Without influenza B virus infection		
	Incidence rate			Incidence rate			Incidence rate		
	No.	Rate	(95% CI)	No.	Rate	(95% CI)	No.	Rate	(95% CI)
Person-years	20.84			40.98			1423.85		
Any non-influenza virus	25	1.20	(0.81-1.78)	23	0.56	(0.37-0.84)	400	0.28	(0.25-0.31)
Rhinovirus	14	0.67	(0.4-1.13)	17	0.41	(0.26-0.67)	279	0.2	(0.17-0.22)
Metapneumovirus	5	0.24	(0.1-0.58)	1	0.02	(0-0.17)	33	0.02	(0.02-0.03)
Coronavirus	0	0	NA	2	0.05	(0.01-0.2)	33	0.02	(0.02-0.03)
Parainfluenza	1	0.05	(0.01-0.34)	2	0.05	(0.01-0.2)	25	0.02	(0.01-0.03)
Respiratory syncytial virus	4	0.19	(0.07-0.51)	1	0.02	(0-0.17)	20	0.01	(0.01-0.02)
Adenovirus	1	0.05	(0.01-0.34)	0	0	(0-Inf)	10	0.01	(0-0.01)

Appendix Table 1. Incidence rates of respiratory virus detection by Reverse-Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction and X-Tag Multiplex Assay

	TIV			Placebo			Household contacts		
	No.	Incidence Rate	(95% CI)	No.	Incidence Rate	(95% CI)	No.	Incidence Rate	(95% CI)
<i>N</i>	479			317			534		
Influenza virus	13	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	23	0.06	(0.04-0.10)	16	0.03	(0.02-0.04)
Any non-influenza virus	174	0.33	(0.28-0.38)	98	0.28	(0.23-0.34)	176	0.29	(0.25-0.34)
Rhinovirus	122	0.23	(0.19-0.27)	66	0.19	(0.15-0.24)	122	0.2	(0.17-0.24)
Metapneumovirus	12	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	7	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	20	0.03	(0.02-0.05)
Coronavirus	15	0.03	(0.02-0.05)	10	0.03	(0.02-0.05)	10	0.02	(0.01-0.03)
Parainfluenza	12	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	6	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	10	0.02	(0.01-0.03)
Respiratory syncytial virus	6	0.01	(0.01-0.03)	7	0.02	(0.01-0.04)	12	0.02	(0.01-0.04)
Adenovirus	7	0.01	(0.01-0.03)	2	0.01	(0-0.02)	2	0	(0-0.01)