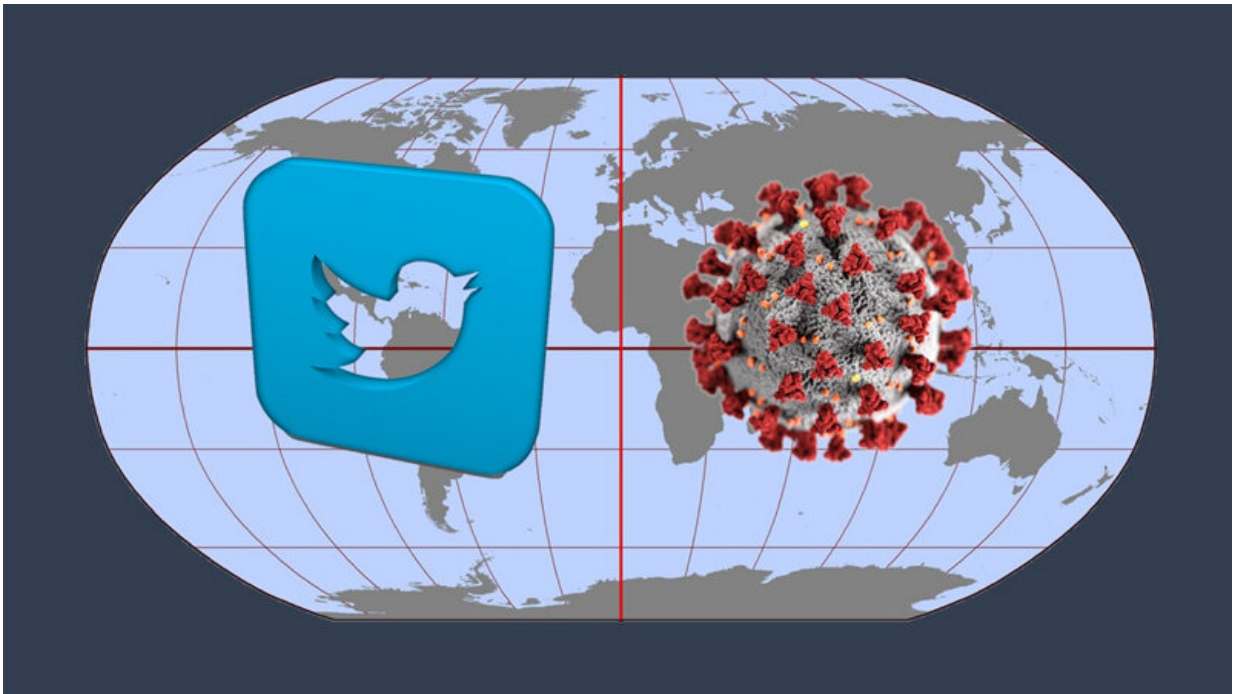


Study says Twitter effectively communicates pediatric critical care info during a pandemic

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Based on data gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine and the Connecticut Children's Medical Center found that social media, primarily Twitter, is an effective way to keep pediatric intensive care units around the world connected and informed during a global medical crisis. Credit: Graphic by M.E. Newman, Johns Hopkins Medicine, using public domain images and SARS-CoV-2 virus from National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Ever since the microblogging and social networking platform Twitter emerged in 2006, it has consistently ranked among the top ways that people around the world communicate with one another, with some 500 million tweets sent per day. According to the Twitter monitoring company, Tweet Binder, the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the Twittersverse with about 600 million tweets alone using the hashtag #COVID19, #coronavirus or something similar between February and May of this year.

Among the massive volume of COVID-19 tweets posted during that time were ones teamed with a second [hashtag](#), #PedsICU—a [social media](#) designation created long before the pandemic to foster [international collaboration](#), rapidly disseminate information and keep the lines of professional communication flowing among members of the pediatric critical care community. How effectively this hashtag twinning actually "spreads the word" about COVID-19 to those serving in pediatric intensive care units (PICUs) worldwide is the subject of a recent study posted online May 27 in the journal *Pediatric Critical Care Medicine*.

"We wanted to determine if leveraging social media, specifically Twitter, was a solid strategy for keeping PICUs across the globe connected and informed on the most current information during a pandemic," says Sapna Kudchadkar, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of anesthesiology and critical care medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and co-investigator for the study.

To conduct their study, Kudchadkar and co-investigator Christopher Carroll, M.D., M.S., research director of pediatric critical care at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, collected data on all tweets posted worldwide from Feb. 1 to May 2 that contained the hashtag #PedsICU, along with those containing both #PedsICU and a recognizable COVID-19 hashtag.

During that span, there were 49,865 #PedsICU tweets, with 21,538 (43%) of them also including a COVID-19 hashtag. Of the latter, #COVID19 was the most commonly used pandemic-related tag (69%). Geographic distribution for tweeters using the tandem hashtags spanned six continents, with the majority of tweets coming from North America and Australia.

There was a sharp rise in tweets with both hashtags around mid-March, which coincided with the World Health Organization raising COVID-19 to pandemic status. Since then, more than two-thirds of #PedsICU tweets were about the disease. About a third of the tweeters were physicians, but the researchers note there also was "robust engagement" from other PICU team members, including nurses, nurse practitioners, respiratory therapists and pharmacists.

One example of social media quickly disseminating COVID-19 news globally occurred April 26, when clinicians in the United Kingdom first recognized multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) was potentially related to COVID-19. Tweets on this announcement with the hashtags #PedsICU and #COVID19 received some 3,500 shares within a few hours of the initial post.

The most popular tweets during the study period, the researchers say, were links to medical literature, reviews, educational videos and other open-access resources.

"Our study demonstrates that during a pandemic such as COVID-19, targeted use of #PedsICU combined with a specific disease-related hashtag significantly helps combat misinformation, quickly spreads useful data and news, and optimizes the reach of pediatric critical care stakeholders to others around the world," says Kudchadkar, who is available for interviews.

More information: Sapna R. Kudchadkar et al. Using Social Media for Rapid Information Dissemination in a Pandemic, *Pediatric Critical Care Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1097/PCC.0000000000002474](https://doi.org/10.1097/PCC.0000000000002474)

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