

More Per Patient Imaging During COVID-19?



While COVID-19 has resulted in decreases in absolute imaging volumes, imaging utilisation on a per-patient basis has not been reported. A surprising new [study](#) published in *Clinical Imaging* shows that clinicians are more likely to request imaging for non-respiratory patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers compared per-patient imaging utilisation, characterised by imaging studies and work relative value units (wRVUs), in an emergency department (ED) during a 30-day COVID-19 surge to the same period in 2019.

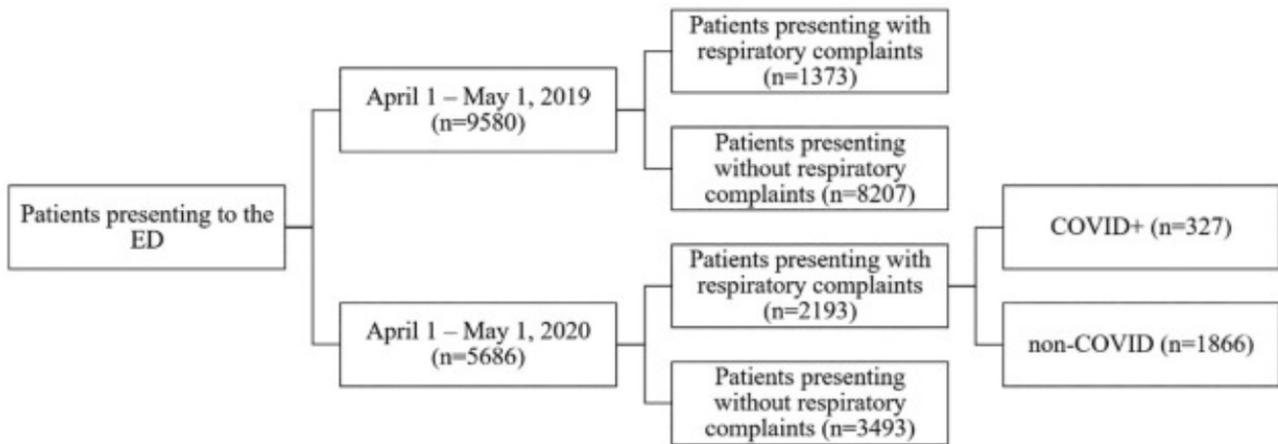
Massachusetts researchers studied found that during 30-days of a COVID-19 surge, patients from a large, urban academic medical centre, who presented to the emergency department *without* respiratory complaints generated 24% more wRVUs/patient and 33% more studies/patient, compared to 2019.

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This single-institution retrospective study included patients presenting to the ED from April 1–May 1, 2020, a period considered to be the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Massachusetts and compared them to patients presenting during the same period in 2019. Patients were stratified into three primary subgroups: all patients ($n = 9580$, $n = 5686$), patients presenting with respiratory complaints ($n = 1373$, $n = 2193$), and patients presenting without respiratory complaints ($n = 8207$, $n = 3493$). The primary outcome was imaging studies/patient and wRVU/patient. Secondary analysis was by disposition and COVID status.

There was a 170% relative increase in patients presenting to the ED *with* respiratory complaints, but this subgroup averaged only 53% wRVU/patient vs. non-respiratory patients.

In 2020, patients without respiratory complaints generated 24% more wRVU/patient ($p < .0001$) and 33% more studies/patient ($p < .0001$), highlighted by 38% more CTs/patient.



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Fig. 1. Flow chart of the study cohort with subgroups by symptom profile and COVID test status.

wRVU = work relative value unit.

Investigators note that this study is the first to report increased per-patient imaging utilisation during COVID-19, characterised by significantly increased studies and wRVUs.

They also identified a significantly increased proportion of patients receiving imaging as well as increased admitted patients, suggesting that less-acute patients are avoiding care.

Authors of the study conclude that as the effects of COVID-19 on radiology practices continue to evolve, knowledge of individualised utilisation growth metrics may help departments understand and plan for imaging trends.

Source: [Clinical Imaging](#)

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