

Trends in COVID-19 Hospital Discharges: Primary vs. Secondary Diagnosis

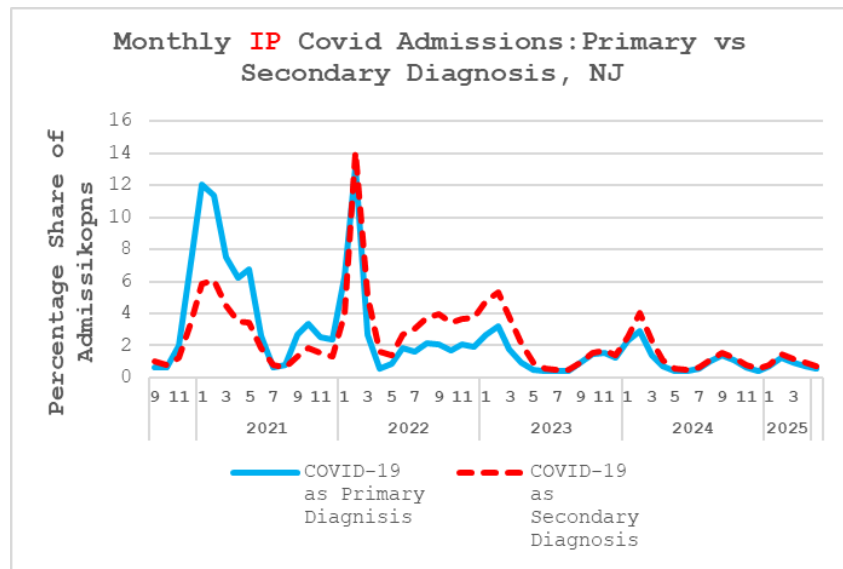
The Center for Health Analytics, Research and Transformation ([CHART](#)) at the New Jersey Hospital Association analyzed monthly hospital discharge data from March 2020 to March 2025 to examine shifts in the classification of COVID-19 diagnoses—whether primary or secondary. Primary diagnosis reflects a patient hospitalized *because* of COVID-19. Secondary diagnosis represents a patient hospitalized for another reason, but with an incidental COVID-19 infection.

The findings are presented through charts covering Inpatient (IP) admissions, Emergency Department (ED) encounters, and all patient types, including same-day medical/surgical cases.

Key Findings

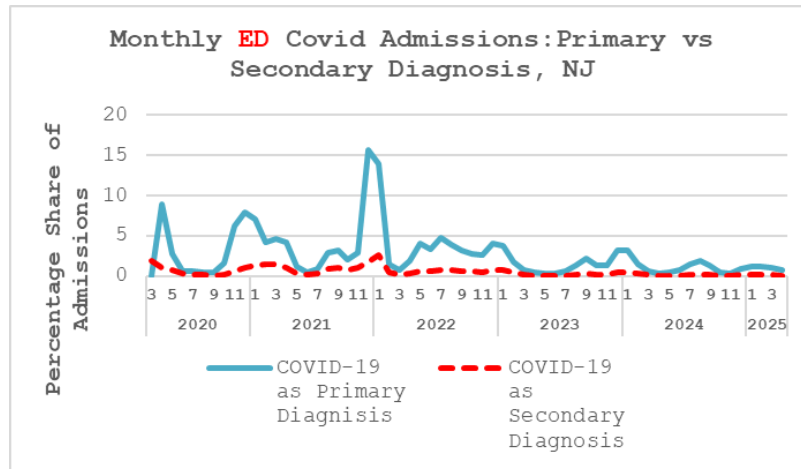
Inpatient Admissions (IP)

- Primary COVID-19 diagnoses dominated early in the pandemic and remained higher through 2021, despite a brief convergence with secondary diagnoses mid-year.
- By early 2022, secondary diagnoses began to surpass primary ones, widening the gap through mid-2023.
- From mid-2023 onward, the percentages of primary and secondary COVID-19 diagnoses stabilized at roughly equal levels.



Emergency Department (ED) Encounters

- Primary COVID-19 diagnoses consistently outnumbered secondary ones throughout the study period.
- Secondary diagnoses remained lower, with fewer fluctuations in percentages.



Other

- Trends for all patients combined mirrored those seen in ED encounters, likely due to the large representation of ED patients in the dataset.
- Trends by gender and race/ethnicity aligned with the overall patterns observed in IP and ED data.

General Observation

Unless there is a significant resurgence of pandemic-level conditions, the distribution of COVID-19 diagnoses among hospital patients appears to have stabilized. These insights offer context that may be valuable in understanding virus circulation and measuring the burden of disease.

Visit www.njha.com/chart for additional resources.
[The New Jersey Hospital Association \(njha.com\)](http://www.njha.com)