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Title: Going Viral: The Influence of Anthropomorphic vs. Realistic Animation on Children's Learning About Viruses

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Developing a biological understanding of viruses is critical for appropriate protective and safety measures (Au & Romo, 1996; Menendez et al., 2024). We investigated how anthropomorphic representations influence children's ($n=231$) learning about COVID-19 through media. We developed three short educational animations (realistic, anthropomorphic, and control) about what happens to viruses inside the body. Children ages 5–8 were tested on their understanding of viruses before and after watching one of the animations. Although most children learned, older children learned more with realistic or anthropomorphic animation than with the control ($b = 0.13$, $pd = 94.33\%$). Learning was equivalent in the realistic and anthropomorphic animations ($b = -0.10$). Older children transferred equally to other viruses from the realistic and anthropomorphic animations ($b = 0.10$, $pd = 91.13\%$) but not the control animation. These results show that animation can scaffold how children learn about invisible biological mechanisms, regardless of anthropomorphism.