

Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children and young people

November 2020

CRWIA – Stage 3

CRWIA title: Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children and young people.	
Publication date: 10 November 2020	
Summary of policy aims and desired outcomes	<p>The First Minister launched <u>Scotland's Strategic Framework</u> setting out a refreshed approach to suppressing COVID-19 on 23 October 2020.</p> <p>This introduced new <u>protection levels</u> providing graduated protections locally and/or nationally. These are underpinned by the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Local Levels) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.</p> <p>Having 5 levels means we can avoid a one size fits all approach. It will enable a part of the country with relatively low transmission to live with fewer restrictions than an area with much higher transmission.</p> <p>The detail within each level is intended to give people greater certainty of what to expect at different rates of transmission.</p> <p>These measures aim to further reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19 in the community and across societal level, including businesses, service providers and Places of Worship whilst keeping schools open, childcare accessible, reducing potential pressures on the NHS and keeping people in work. We have a duty to balance all of the different harms caused by the pandemic.</p>
Executive summary	<p>The rights and wellbeing of children and young people are at the centre of our response to COVID-19 which is why we have prioritised keeping schools open and ensuring that children and young people are still able to gather with their friends within the limits announced.</p> <p>In these unprecedented times, difficult decisions have had to be made. This document builds upon the work undertaken in the past months to ensure that children's rights and wellbeing are at the heart of our response to COVID-19 and the previous CRWIAs which have been published. It sets out our efforts to mitigate the wider harms on children, through decisions that are necessary at this stage to keep our country safe. This is a global pandemic, and these are highly uncertain times, which means our decision making process is continuous and multi-faceted. We will continue to make every effort to ensure that children's rights and wellbeing are central</p>

	to this approach and that children’s rights and wellbeing impact assessments are undertaken and published.
Background	<p>This CRWIA sets out the consideration which has been given to children’s rights and wellbeing for the latest COVID-19 measures to enable children and young people to live their lives as normally as possible, to minimise the impact on their health and wider wellbeing. It builds upon and draws from a range of other work which has been or is being undertaken to consider children’s rights and wellbeing as part of our response to COVID-19.</p> <p>Collaborative Leadership Group The Scottish Government set up a collaborative leadership group with a range of senior stakeholders across children’s services, early on in the pandemic. This has created a space for action to ensure support for children, particularly those most vulnerable, continues throughout this period.</p> <p>Vulnerable Children Data Intelligence report 24 April 2020</p> <p>Vulnerable Children Report 15 May 2020</p> <p>Education</p> <p>An EQIA and CRWIA were carried on the closure and reopening of schools and can be found here:</p> <p>Schools closing reopening EQIA</p> <p>Schools closing reopening CRWIA</p> <p>UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: COVID-19 Statement – 6 August 2020 – Scotland response</p> <p>On 8 April 2020, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child published a statement that expresses concern about the situation of children globally, particularly those in situations of vulnerability, due to the effects of the COVID-19. The Scottish Government recognises the need to embed human rights of the child in taking measures to tackle the public health threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The table below sets out our approach to the COVID-19 response, particularly in relation to the 11 areas highlighted by the Committee. Additionally, reporting on the use of the emergency powers contained within the Coronavirus Act 2020 and Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 can be found here.</p>

	<p>An independent CRIA, commissioned by the Children and Young People Commissioner for Scotland was carried out on the 11 areas highlighted by the UN Committee.</p> <p>An independent CRIA was carried out on the regulations as they were amended in July 2020 by the Observatory of Children’s Rights. It covered a range of themes including physical health, mental health, education, poverty, food and digital access, play, child protection, children with disabilities, children with detention. This independent analysis was extremely helpful and continues to inform our approach in relation to responding to the evolution public health situation. It can be found here.</p>
<p>Scope of the CRWIA, identifying the children and young people affected by the policy, and summarising the evidence base</p>	<p>The changes apply at a societal level and as such all children and young people under 18 are impacted. There is a disproportionate effect on children because the duration of this pandemic, and the associated restrictions take up a greater part of their lives so far, in comparison to adults. This means that for some children, born during the pandemic, their whole lives have been during this period. For school age children, their learning has been disrupted and their ability to meet freely with their friends restricted.</p> <p>There is a strong recognition that social interactions, with friends and wider family plays a key role to optimise children’s development and their wider wellbeing, this has different impacts depending on their age and stage of development, and the circumstances that children are currently living in. A range of evidence has been gathered on the impact on children during this time, and it shows that although for some aspects of some children’s lives there have been positive effects, such as spending more time with their parents in the home, for the majority of children the impacts have been negative across most aspects and continue to be so.</p> <p>Essential services have been maintained during this time, that are both trauma informed and responsive to need. These services have provided a ‘life line’ for some families, particularly with younger children and new parents, who may not have had access to any other support during this time.</p>
<p>Children and young people’s views and experiences</p>	<p>Recent studies have found that the COVID pandemic and the effects of social isolation have had a large impact on mental health. Maternal mental health is important; problems with maternal mental are associated with maternal mortality and can impact on children’s health and wellbeing. A study of 474 new and expectant parents in the UK during the height of the lockdown restrictions found that 69% parents felt their ability to cope with their pregnancy or baby had been impacted by</p>

COVID-19 and mental health was cited as a main concern for 61% of parents¹.

The current pandemic has the potential to negatively impact very young children even if they do not fully understand what is happening, they can pick up on cues from their parents who may be stressed or upset. Children can find the impact of unemployment, exposure to negative reports in the media and changes such as parents increasingly working from home stressful. In the first six years of life children are especially vulnerable to these stressors. An ongoing study of families in Australia aims to understand how the stress associated with COVID-19 might impact the mental health of children under 5.

A survey of parents of children aged 2 – 7 year olds carried out end June to early July², spanning the time when physical distancing restrictions were removed for under-12 year olds, found a mixed picture with regards to play, with some positive impacts of lockdown. For 46% of the children, parents and carers rated their imaginative play since lockdown as better than before lockdown, while 12% rated it worse. Looking at active play, 43% of children had played actively inside on at least four out of the last seven days, while 81% of children had played outside on at least four out of the last seven days.

The survey of parents of children aged 2-7³ found that almost half (46%) of 2 – 3 year olds and over a third (36%) of 4-7 year olds had a slightly raised, high, or very high Strength and Difficulty Score, indicating the presence of behavioural or emotional difficulties. This is higher than in a nationally representative survey completed just before lockdown.

However, looking at play with others, 14% of children had not met up with anyone else from outside their household, and a further 24% had not met any other children. In the early half of the fieldwork period, children were allowed to meet others only with physical distancing, and 76% of parents reported finding it difficult or stressful to enforce physical distancing measures.

A series of surveys of children aged 8 -14 carried out in April, May and June⁴ found that over half reported feeling bored

¹ [Babies in Lockdown - Home-Start UK, Best Beginnings, the Parent Infant Foundation, and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance - 5 August 2020](#)

² COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey (CEYRIS) <http://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris>

³ COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey (CEYRIS) <http://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris>

⁴ Children's Parliament How Are you doing? survey <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/HOW-ARE-YOU-DOING-SURVEY-REPORT-August-2020.pdf>

often and there was a small decline in children reporting having fun things to do in their days between April (75%) and June (72%). Across all three months of the survey, 17% of children reported a worry about not being able to play or be creative.

The surveys of 8 to 14 year olds⁵ found that children displayed a decline in mental wellbeing over the three surveys. In June, more children reported being lonely, and fewer felt in a positive mood and resilient than in April. Across the months, around a third of respondents indicated that there are lots of things to worry about, while more than half expressed a general worry about the future. Around a quarter reported being worried about five or more things. Girls aged 12 – 14 were most likely to report all negative mental wellbeing impacts.

A survey of children aged 11 to 18 carried out in April⁶ found that 2 in 5 young people were concerned about their own mental wellbeing.

An online survey for 12-17 year olds on the impact of lockdown on young people's health and wellbeing carried out in mid-May to early July⁷ found significant mental health impacts. There was a three-fold increase in respondents' self-reported feelings of loneliness from nearly one in ten (9%) of respondents recalling feeling lonely before lockdown to nearly a third (28%) reporting loneliness during lockdown. When asked if they had felt nervous or stressed because of COVID-19 in the past week, about a fifth of respondents (22%) said 'most' or 'all of the time'. Across almost all questions, 15 to 17 year olds had a worse experience than the younger age group (12-14), and girls reported a worse experience than boys.

A survey of parents of school age children carried out in May and June⁸, found that three quarters of parents were worried about their child missing their friends, and 57% were worried about their child's health and wellbeing.

⁵ Children's Parliament How Are you doing? survey <https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/HOW-ARE-YOU-DOING-SURVEY-REPORT-August-2020.pdf>

⁶ Lockdown Lowdown <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cee5bd0687a1500015b5a9f/t/5ebc2206ee7a6919fe41a562/1589387823919/LockdownLowdown+Results+by+Demographic+Breakdown.pdf>

⁷ TeenCovidLife survey https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2020-08-07_teencovidlife_survey_1_general_report_v2.pdf

⁸ Connect survey https://www.connect.scot/application/files/7115/9604/1415/Connect_Parent_Carer_Survey_Next_Steps_How_are_you_doing_now_quantitative_report_29_July_2020_FINAL.pdf

More recent surveys, some taken over time, show that there are continuing concerns over mental health, ability to socialise and play with peers. Alongside this there is more evidence emerging that for certain groups of children, some impacts are more severe, due to their life circumstances.

- A number of Scottish studies indicate increasing concern about the impact of **rising poverty** on the wellbeing of children and families. Food poverty is a common theme, with one survey by Includem⁹ reporting that nearly half of low income families surveyed struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis.
- It is becoming apparent that children and families with a health condition that makes them most clinically vulnerable to Covid-19 (the groups previously advised to “**shield**”) may be an under-recognised group at risk of adverse impacts from Covid-19. Play deprivation and loss of regular peer interaction appears to be a key issue for this group of children¹⁰.
- Wider UK evidence emphasises the importance of **friendships** for children and young people’s wellbeing. Emerging UK evidence¹¹ suggests that primary-aged children may have experienced a sustained loss of peer interaction (in person and online) during and after lockdown. Research with older children reports a strong preference for face-to-face communication (over social media) in a ‘safe space’.
- The most recent Family Fund survey¹² paints a worsening picture of the **wellbeing of disabled and seriously ill children** in Scotland according to parents surveyed. Families surveyed report continuing financial struggles, rising deteriorations in children’s physical and mental health, and an ongoing shortage of support services (despite some recovery in formal service provision).

⁹ https://www.includem.org/resources/1602001657_Poverty-and-the-Impact-of-Coronavirus-on-Young-People-and-Families---Includem---Oct-2020.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.playscotland.org/resources/covid-19-and-childrens-play-update-2-september-2020/>

¹¹ <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/life-on-hold-childrens-well-being-and-covid-19.pdf>

¹² <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/news/health-and-wellbeing-of-disabled-children-at-risk-under-pandemic-as-government-announces-extra-10-million-funding-for-children-with-complex-needs>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research by Intercultural Youth Scotland¹³ reports BME young people’s feelings of disadvantage (compared to their white peers) in relation to their education in particular, and future opportunities as a result of Covid. Police presence during lockdown is reported to have limited opportunities for some BME young people to exercise and socialise during lockdown. • Overall, the evidence suggests the need for more targeted messaging and information and recovery planning focused on the needs of specific sub-groups of children and families, with an emphasis on mental wellbeing and trauma-informed approaches in schools in particular.
<p>Key Findings, including an assessment of the impact on children’s rights, and how the measure will contribute to children’s wellbeing</p>	<p>We have continued to ensure that the best interests of the child (article 3) have been central to our response to the COVID-19, including in relation to the imposition of these latest restrictions. Consideration was given to specific articles in particular in balancing the risks of transmission with the rights and wellbeing of children and young people.</p> <p>We recognise the fundamental importance to the realisation of children’s rights and wellbeing of keeping schools open ensuring that children and young people continue to access their right to education (articles 28 and 29) and rights to leisure and play (article 31) and freedom of association (article 15).</p> <p>For children and young people, the importance of maintaining social interaction and engagement with their peers is of fundamental importance to wellbeing which is why important exemptions are being applied to the general population level restrictions on social gatherings so that children and young people can to continue to, as far as possible, interact with their friends socially. The science is clear that indoor social gatherings in your own home or someone else’s home, for any age, is not possible at this time, but outdoor social gatherings are seen as lower risk, and continue to be allowed.</p> <p>For younger children, under 12, their right to play and socialise freely with their peers (article 31) was actively considered, along with their lower risk for becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19 and their perceived lower risk of transmission. This age group continue to have the least</p>

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9aaa1c0bdba3921bd4433/t/5f74cd3e560f724947cdd939/1601490289574/COVID+IN+COLOUR+FINAL+UPLOAD+VERSION.pdf>

stringent measures applied and are free to meet up with their friends, with no physical distancing outdoors or indoors in public spaces, subject to other public health hygiene measures being followed. Unless the local area is at Level 0, no one can enter another persons' home unless they fall under some very specific exceptions. You can enter to use the toilet facilities, and that is important, particularly for young children and those with a disability, who can still meet up in private gardens.

For older children and young people we have also sought to recognise the rights to leisure and play and freedom of association (articles 31 and 15) and the benefit to wellbeing of maintaining as much social interaction and engagement with friends as possible, whilst balancing the increased risks of transition. This is why specific exemptions to the general population gathering restrictions have been put in place so that a maximum of six 12 to 17 year olds can meet in outdoor spaces, including a private garden, with no household limit where physical distancing is still maintained.

All children, of any age have a right to mix with their peers and develop social capabilities (article 15).

Recognising the needs of the youngest children and the interrelation to maternal mental health and wellbeing, we made [changes](#) on 5th October to extend the number of adults allowed indoors at any one time for indoor organised activities for babies under 12 months. This has now been reviewed to include children under 5 years, recognising the wider opportunities this brings. This will support their ongoing development and socialisation, as well as protecting mothers mental health (article 6, article 31). Transmission risks remain higher in indoor settings, so due regard was given to limit the number of households who can mix at this time (article 24). Most indoor organised activities cannot take place at Level 4 but outdoor organised activities can still continue. This provides additional scope for children of all ages to meet and interact, outside of school or more formal settings. Continuation of support for the most vulnerable children, young people and families will also remain available.

We have also retained, as far as possible, the ability of children and young people to continue to access services and activities that continue to promote their wider wellbeing. Children under 18 are still able to access indoor and outdoor sport and recreation activities, and attend other organised activities. The wider social harms for children were considered at this time, balanced with protecting overall health (article 24, article 31).

Monitoring and review	We will continue to consider the impact of these changes on children's rights and wellbeing including by engaging with relevant stakeholders and will publish further child rights and wellbeing impact assessments as is best practice.	
CRWIA Declaration		
Authorisation		
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Deputy Director or equivalent: Michael Chalmers Director for Children And Families, Scottish Government	Date: 9 November 2020	



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