

CRWIA

CRWIA title: Impact of potential COVID-19 restrictions on children and young people.

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Summary of policy aims and desired outcomes

Enhanced restrictions are being put in place in level 4 areas light of the emergence of a new strain (VUI 202012/01) of COVID-19 in November 2020. The latest evidence from Imperial College, published on 31 December presents a consensus that this new variant has a substantial transmission advantage, with an estimated increased rate of transmission between 0.4 and 0.7.¹ The percentage of cases composed of this new variant is increasing rapidly, from 42.7 per cent on 31 December to 47.5 per cent on 3 January. It is very likely that this strain will further increase in dominance in Scotland in a similar way to that already seen in London and SE England.

SAGE and other forums have highlighted the need to act to reduce spread of the virus and the likelihood that this new strain poses as great a transmission risk to and from children and young people as the wider population, which was not the case with the previous variant of the virus. This means children and young people are as likely to transmit the virus within their household as the wider population. It is not yet known if it increases severity of illness in children and young people, and evidence that would allow us to assess this may take some time to emerge. However the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) made a statement on this on 2nd January, suggesting no increase in admissions to hospital of severely unwell children was being seen at this time.²

The Regulations take steps to limit the opportunities for people to meet in level 4 areas. Our aim in doing this is to reduce the chance for the virus to spread. At the same time we want to enable limited household interaction in recognition of the health and other impacts of these restrictions.

The regulations move to an enforceable “stay at home” restriction which entails reinstating the criminal offence of

¹ [Report 42 - Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 Lineage B.1.1.7 in England: insights from linking epidemiological and genetic data | Faculty of Medicine | Imperial College London](#)

² [RCPCH responds to media reports of increased admissions of children and young people with COVID-19 | RCPCH](#)

	<p>leaving your home, subject to a range of reasonable excuses. This would allow a person to leave their home for a range of essential reasons, such as: for work; childcare; education; providing care; accessing public services; to undertake exercise or recreation outdoors; and to visit a member of their extended household.</p> <p>The regulations also reduce the current rule which allows inter-household gatherings of up to six people from up to two households to meet (applicable in public indoor places and outdoors), to a rule allowing a gathering of only two people from two households in public indoor places and outdoors.</p> <p>Existing exceptions for younger children are maintained. These would provide that: children under the age of 12 neither count towards household nor person limits allowing them to continue to interact and play with peers.</p> <p>Due to the increased risk to health, by onward transmission of Covid-19, young people between the ages of 12 and 17 can now only meet in groups of up to 2 in line with adults, a reduction from the previous limit of 6</p> <p>People will continue to be able to go outdoors with members of their household, including an extended household. These measures complement each other, and are intended to produce a substantial reduction in inter-household socialising and gathering. Introducing these measures together, and in law, would also significantly enhance the capability of enforcement authorities to take practical steps to secure compliance where this proves necessary. In essence, as in April and May, the police would have a lawful basis to question any group of more than two adults to ensure that they are adhering to the restrictions.</p>
<p>Executive summary</p>	<p>The rights and wellbeing of children and young people are at the centre of our response to COVID-19. To date we have prioritised maintaining early learning and childcare, keeping schools open and ensuring that children and young people are still able to gather with their friends within the limits.</p> <p>However, as we learn more about the new variant, we continue to review when face to face education can resume. The new strain has already made a normal scheduled return impossible and we have taken the decision that schools should be open only for vulnerable children and children of key workers until 1 February with other pupils having remote learning.</p>

	<p>In these unprecedented times, difficult decisions have had to be made. This document builds upon the work undertaken in recent 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.</p> <p>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 highly uncertain times, which means our decision making process is continuous and multi-faceted. We face the challenge of a further strain of the virus which evidence suggests is not only more transmissible, but presents an equal transmission risk to children and young people as it does to the population more broadly.</p> <p>We will continue to take every effort to ensure that children’s rights and wellbeing are central to this approach and that children’s rights and wellbeing impact assessments are undertaken and published.</p>
Background	<p>This CRWIA sets out the consideration which has been given to children’s rights and wellbeing for potential restrictions on outdoor social gatherings. It also weighs up the impacts of the 4 harms of the virus on children and young people. 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>
Scope of the CRWIA, identifying the children and young people affected by the policy, and summarising the evidence base	<p>The changes apply at a societal level and as such all children and young people under 18 living in a level 4 area are impacted. There is a disproportionate effect on children because the duration of this pandemic, and the associated restrictions takes up a greater part of the lives so far, in comparison to adults.</p> <p>Two main areas were considered: firstly, the impact on children and young people of the stay at home policy and secondly the impact on 12 – 17 year olds of changing the previous position where up to 6 young people were able to meet from 6 households to only allowing 2 young people from 2 households to meet.</p> <p>There is a strong recognition that social interactions, with friends and wider family has a key role in optimising children’s development and their wider wellbeing. This has different impacts depending on their age and stage of development, and the circumstances in which children are currently living.</p> <p>A range of evidence has been gathered on the impact on children during this time, and it shows that although for some</p>

	<p>children the experience has had some positive effects (including spending more time with their parents in the home) for the majority of children the impacts have been and continue to be negative.</p> <p>Tighter restrictions on outdoor household mixing has the potential to widen inequalities and have differential, and likely exacerbated, impacts on children who are already marginalised or disadvantaged including those with a disability, those with caring duties or residing in unsuitable housing. Lack of access to suitable private outdoor space has been an even greater barrier to wellbeing during the pandemic than in 'normal' times.</p>
<p>Children and young people's views and experiences</p>	<p>Due to the duration of the pandemic, there is a wide range of evidence about the impact of the very tight restrictions of lockdown, and the impacts of the easing of these measures over time. The positive gains from the easing of measures for children and young people, were not felt equally, and some children are still recovering from these experiences, particularly those that were already most disadvantaged.</p> <p>Our decision-making process has been informed by the four harms approach. The four key harms are: the direct impact of COVID-19 on health; the wider impact that the virus is having on health and social care services; how the restrictions are impacting on our broader way of living and society (including the negative effects on wellbeing and inequality); and effect of the restrictions on our economy. The balance of harms for children is still currently weighted most heavily towards harm three (social harms). Strong mitigations need to continue to ensure that the rights of children and young people are protected, as far as possible, and considered independently and alongside the wider population-level impacts.</p> <p>Some survey evidence compares impact before lockdown (in March) to the current time point. Most surveys showed a negative impact during that time, particularly in wellbeing. Our baseline is already lower than it was in March and any new tightening of restrictions will compound this still further.</p> <p>Background/further evidence</p> <p>A series of surveys of children aged 8 -14 carried out in April, May and June³ found that over half reported feeling bored often and that there was a small decline in children reporting having fun things to do in their days between April (75%) and</p>

³ 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>

June (72%). Across all three months of the survey, 17% of children reported a worry about not being able to play or be creative.

A survey of parents of children aged 2 – 7 year olds carried out between the end of June to early July⁴ (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.

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. The relaxation of the physical distancing requirements for those aged under 12 will therefore have had a positive impact.

A survey of children aged 11 to 18 carried out in April⁵ found that 2 in 5 young people were concerned about their own mental wellbeing.

The surveys of 8 to 14 year olds⁶ 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.

⁴ COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey (CEYRIS)
<http://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris>

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

⁶ 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>

The survey of parents of children aged 2-7⁷ 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.

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 July⁸ 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.

However the evidence on the relative impact of the lockdown on boys and girls appears mixed. An on-line survey for young people aged 12-24 showed that there was a significant difference in young people's self-reported emotional wellbeing since lockdown began, with more young people reporting that they would describe their emotional wellbeing as poor. Before lockdown, 18% of respondents described their emotional wellbeing as negative. This increased to 51% during lockdown. Boys and young men were more likely to report positive emotional wellbeing before the lockdown than girls and young women. However, during lockdown, the rates for both demographics are broadly similar suggesting a greater deterioration for males.⁹

A survey that included young carers carried out over October and November 2020 showed responses that suggested while support for them in their caring role was good initially, contact in some cases has stopped more recently. The focus group members said COVID-19 has changed their roles and that it has been difficult to access other support for the person they care for. All participants said how hard it was to take a break at the moment, and it was easier when they were at home

⁷ COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey (CEYRIS)
<http://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/covid-19-early-years-resilience-and-impact-survey-ceyris>

⁸ TeenCovidLife survey https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2020-08-07_teencovidlife_survey_1_general_report_v2.pdf

⁹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cc7195fceaeb60001c9dc58/t/5f182d467dacec7cf2fa127b/1595420029484/TIE-ONLINE+IN+LOCKDOWN-REPORT.pdf>

	<p>during lockdown. Now that schools have returned it is harder to take a break. Another participant said that the restrictions have made it harder to see friends and get out of the house.¹⁰</p> <p>A survey of parents of school age children carried out in May and June¹¹, 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.</p> <p>Further evidence can be found at: Independent Children’s Rights Impact Assessment: Appendices - The Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland (cypcs.org.uk)</p>
<p>Key Findings, including an assessment of the impact on children and young people’s rights, and how the measure will contribute to children and young people’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. It is not yet clear, at this stage, whether children and young people will be at more risk of severe illness from this variant of Covid-19 (article 6).</p> <p>The policy to restrict the number of young people who can meet as a group from 6 to 2 represents a significant change to the previous position where up to 6 young people were able to meet.. This action is however balanced with the need to protect public health more broadly and do the utmost to break transmission routes within all communities in light of the emerging evidence that young people are transmitting the virus at the same level as other age groups.</p> <p>There is a broad range of evidence to suggest the positive impact of interaction between children and their peers, and this was considered as part of this process. A summary of which can be found above.</p> <p>For children and young people, maintaining social interaction and engagement with their peers is of fundamental importance to wellbeing and their longer term development, which is why important exemptions are being applied to the general population level restrictions on social gatherings so that children under the age of 12 can continue to, as far as possible, interact with their friends socially.</p> <p>For younger children, under 12, their right to play (article 31) was actively considered, both with each other and as part of</p>

¹⁰ Lockdown Lowdown: The Voice of Seldom Heard Groups During COVID19 Pandemic Report

¹¹ 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

normalising the situation as far as possible. Limiting as far as possible further restrictions on this age group will be crucial to minimise the longer term impacts on their development and wider wellbeing.

For young people aged 12 – 17 we have considered the impact of reducing socialisation with their peers. Limiting as far as possible further restrictions on this age group will be crucial to minimise the longer term impacts on their development and wider wellbeing.

We have also considered whether the restrictions on gatherings, to allow only two people from two households to meet over the age of 12, will have a detrimental impact on young people aged between 12 to 17. This could potentially mean that parents/carers have to leave these young people alone at home in order to meet with another adult outside the home. This would especially be the case for lone parent families. The ability to retain 'extended households' will go some way to reducing this risk but some risks do remain.

There is also a risk of these young people being excluded from social contact with wider family members, where the 2/2 rule is applied. Although the regulations retain the existing exceptions for children under the age of 12, they do introduce further restrictions on the number of adults and anyone aged 12 and over with whom they can meet outside of their household.

For children and young people experiencing adverse home conditions, the limiting of the ability to see people outside the home may worsen their wellbeing, limit the extent to which they gain emotional support from others.

However, households, including extended households, can still go outside for exercise or spend time outdoors.

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 12 are still able to access 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).

Consideration was given to also allowing young people aged 12-17 to take part in organised outdoor sport and exercise. We recognise that being physically active is important for

	<p>physical and mental health. In addition sports clubs provide a structure and support mechanism in many young people's lives, particularly where it might be a diversionary activity from alcohol or drugs.</p> <p>However, given the increased risks of transmission, these activities can now only be undertaken following the rules around meeting other households.</p> <p>Ultimately, there was a careful judgment to be made about 12 to 17 year olds, reconciling the Harm 1 (risk of transmission of Covid, both between teenagers and from teenagers returning the disease to their households) and harm 3 (damage to opportunities to socialise for teenagers) impacts of teenagers socialising.</p> <p>The increased incidence of transmission in the new strain has meant a tightening of gatherings rules generally, and has changed the balance when it comes to the range of previous exceptions. While there is evidence that young people are less seriously ill when they catch the disease, the evidence that they spread it less is much weaker. When dealing with a variant with a significantly increased transmission rate, this changes the risk of gatherings of 12—17 year olds, particularly in respect of the possibility of them bringing the disease back to their own households.</p> <p>Ultimately, we considered variants which would have led to less harm 3, for example allowing teenagers to socialise in groups of up to 3, but taking account of the above considered that it could not run that risk at the moment.</p>
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	
Policy lead Elizabeth Sadler Deputy Director, Covid Ready Society Directorate for Covid Public Health Scottish Government	Date 5 January 2021
Deputy Director or equivalent N/A	Date