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Law enforcement in coronavirus online safety push as National Crime Agency reveals 300,000 in UK pose sexual threat to children

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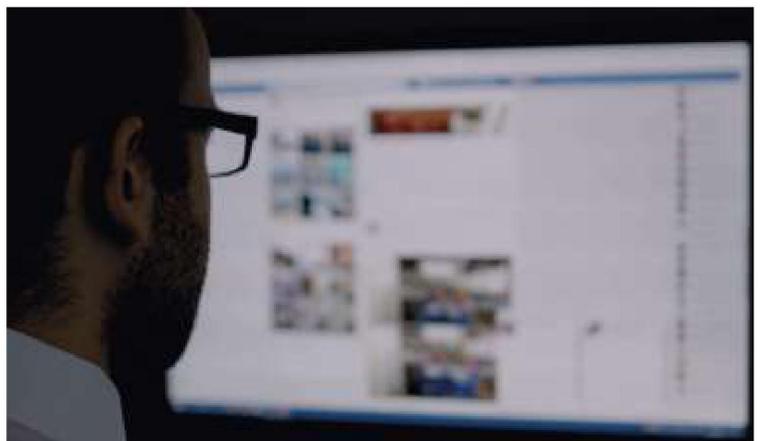
Law enforcement in coronavirus online safety push as National Crime Agency reveals 300,000 in UK pose sexual threat to children

[Child sexual abuse \(/component/tags/tag/child-sexual-abuse\)](/component/tags/tag/child-sexual-abuse)

Two of Britain's top officers are urging children, parents and carers to ensure they know how to stay safe online – with the National Crime Agency's latest assessment showing there are at least 300,000 people in the UK posing a sexual threat to children.

The agency released the figure – which comes from intelligence pre-dating the coronavirus outbreak – as it and UK policing warn of a spike in online child sex offending during the coronavirus crisis.

Based on the NCA's developing understanding – from a variety of sources – it believes there are a minimum 300,000 individuals in the UK posing a sexual threat to children, either through physical 'contact' abuse or online.



And such is the prevalence of online abuse, NCA investigators were able to find CSA content on the open web in just three clicks.

With most schools closed and children increasingly online, the NCA and National Police Chiefs' Council are urging children, parents and carers to ensure they know how to stay safe on the web – with the NCA launching a new #OnlineSafetyAtHome campaign through its education team at CEOP – the Child Exploitation and Online Protection command.

A host of informative, educational products aimed at children of all ages, parents, carers and teachers will be issued through the agency's Thinkuknow website and social media channels. The activities are easily incorporated into home schooling. [Quick-exit \(https://www.thinkuknow.org.uk/quick-exit/\)](https://www.thinkuknow.org.uk/quick-exit/)

With children spending more time online to do school work or occupy themselves while parents and carers are busy, they face an increased threat from offenders who are also online in greater numbers.

The NCA and UK policing relentlessly fight the online child sexual abuse threat, arresting more than 500 child sex offenders and safeguarding around 700 children each month.

Since schools closed because of coronavirus the number of child safety concerns reported through the CEOP website has stayed largely the same.

While there has been decreased reporting from professionals, such as teachers and social workers, the level of reports from children has remained stable. There has been no delay in how the agency triages and responds to these reports.

But the NCA also knows from online chat that offenders are discussing opportunities to abuse children during the Covid 19 crisis.

Rob Jones, NCA director of threat leadership, said:

“Child sexual abuse remains a priority threat for the agency at this difficult time.

“Though we are working around the virus like everyone else, we are continuing to pursue high-risk online offenders to ensure they are arrested and children are safeguarded.

“The internet has undeniable benefits to society.

“But it's also enabled a section of society to commit increasingly horrific crimes against children through grooming, live-streaming and distribution of indecent images.

“Preventing offences occurring is always crucial and now more so than ever when there is masses of online traffic and a possible elevated threat to children.

“We are redoubling our efforts to promote our online safety messages to children, parents, carers and teachers and are working with partners to keep children safe.

“We have long said that we want the tech industry to do more to protect children.

“The advice and activities on our Thinkuknow website are really important and easily built into home schooling programmes.”

NPCC lead for child protection Chief Constable Simon Bailey said: “It is sickening to think that some criminals are looking to exploit the coronavirus crisis to cause harm online. Despite the issues that the pandemic will cause for law enforcement, child protection is still a priority and we remain totally committed to keeping our young people safe.”

“Our joint work with the NCA means we have better intelligence and are arresting more sex offenders than ever before. “We will maintain a focus on those who are intent on causing harm to young people and we will strive to bring them to justice. I am also continuing the important work with tech companies to make sure they are playing their part to make the internet as safe as possible.

“Equally as important as police action is making sure children have all the information and tools they need to keep themselves safe online. The Thinkuknow website is a great place for parents to go for advice and a good way to pass the time whilst children are at home.”

The agency is kicking off its programme by providing 15-minute activities to parents and carers to do with their children – and new activities will be launched fortnightly.

Activities have been specifically designed to be fun, yet educational using the Thinkuknow content for the target age group.

Activities will be available for families of children across all age groups (4-5, 5-7, 8-10, 11-14 and 14+) and delivered to families through the new delivery methods being used by schools, as well as sectors including social care, law enforcement, health and charity.

For advice about online child safety visit [Thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/) (<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>).

The agency is also releasing Covid 19 specific content through Parent Info, a news feed and website the NCA runs with digital family experts Parent Zone. Over 6,000 schools and organisations have registered to receive content from [Parentinfo.org](http://parentinfo.org/) (<http://parentinfo.org/>).

Child Protection Charity The Lucy Faithfull Foundation runs the Stop It Now! helpline which offers confidential advice to anyone concerned about their own or someone else’s behaviour towards children.

Donald Findlater, director of the Stop It Now! helpline, said:

“In this time of serious worries due to coronavirus, it’s important that every parent and grandparent is aware of the support available to help them keep children safe. So as families try to keep education going, these engaging online safety resources are a great idea.

“With normal life so different for all of us, parents are more than ever at the forefront of keeping their children safe online and offline, and knowing where to get help and support is vital. Every day our confidential Stop It Now! helpline talks to parents worried about how to keep their children safe - and we talk to parents worrying about their own children's sexual behaviour.

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"Our helpline also talks to adults concerned about their sexual thoughts, helping them manage these so that children are safe. Some people who pose an online or offline risk to children will be struggling with their sexual thoughts or behaviour and need help to manage them. Right now, in this isolation we all experience, it is important that they get help, too. Providing that help keeps children safer."

If you are concerned a crime has been committed against a child you should contact your local police.



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