

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN'S PLAY

Summary: This note has been prepared at the request of the Play Safety Forum¹ including, notably, Play England, Play Scotland, Play Wales and PlayBoard Northern Ireland. The purpose is to summarise emerging evidence on the effects of play restrictions in terms of a) reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the population and b) the detriments to children resulting from the restrictions.

It is concluded that the current UK interventions need to be urgently reviewed because:

- the benefits to children of playing outside bring a host of social, emotional and physical rewards. These have long been undervalued and at this time appear to have been completely ignored. Consequently, children are suffering harm;
- the evidence is that the risks posed by COVID-19 to children playing in outdoor spaces is very low;
- proportionate decision making requires that trade-offs between the risks and benefits of safety interventions are part of the decision process. The evidence summarised below is that current UK policy is much more harmful to children than beneficial.

Introduction

In the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis (February-June 2020) children have been hard hit with stay-at-home orders and the closure of schools, childcare, playgrounds and some other outdoor spaces, and loss of opportunities for learning and socialising.² The purpose of this note is to provide factual information in so far as there are known facts to help decision makers responsible for play provision. This paper has been written partly to counter myths and misinformation but also to support more rational, evidence-informed decision making.

What is the Risk to Children Posed by COVID-19?

COVID-19 is unusual for an infectious disease in that the risks to the young are very small

Figure 1 shows the case fatality rate (CFR) for 10-year age categories for four countries.³ The CFR is calculated by dividing the number of confirmed deaths from COVID-19 by the number of diagnosed cases. There is considerable uncertainty around these data because the number of diagnosed cases is likely to be far less than the true number of infected cases. Nonetheless, as a group, children themselves can be seen to be at much lower risk than other ages. This is informative because it shows where controls and resources are most needed. The data show that COVID-19 is unusual for an infectious disease in that the risk to the young appears to be much lower than for other age groups.

¹ For a full list of members please see: <https://playsafetyforum.wordpress.com/>

² See 'Play First: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing after lockdown'. <https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/2020/05/13/play-first-supporting-childrens-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-during-and-after-lockdown/>

³ Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Joe Hasell (2020) "Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)". *Published online at OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved (11 June 2020) from: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus> [Online Resource] <https://ourworldindata.org/mortality-risk-covid>. 'Our World in Data' are collaborative efforts between researchers at the University of Oxford, who are the scientific editors of the website content; and the non-profit organisation Global Change Data Lab.