

Impact of Covid

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented experience for pregnant and new parents, babies, young children and their families. It significantly changed the environment that a baby was born into and that a young child spent all or most of their short lives in. The environment a child experiences in their first five years of life, and particularly in the first 1,001 days from pregnancy to age two, leaves an enduring imprint, and may impact long term outcomes.

At the start of lockdown, there was little knowledge about how babies and young children would be impacted by pandemic measures, and governments in the UK focussed less on them than on school-aged children. There was a prevalent focus on the “loss of learning” caused by the closure of [educational settings](#), followed by an attempt to “catch up on learning” after lockdown, but this often ignored the holistic development needs of the youngest children. The risks of the potentially adverse impact of lockdown measures and post-lockdown changes for babies and young children and their parents were not appropriately assessed at the time. In fact, the [UK's pandemic policies harmed children](#) and their rights and interests were not adequately considered by decision makers (Mockett 2023).

We now have an opportunity to better understand how the youngest children were impacted and consider this evidence in the recovery phase, both for the babies and young children who were directly impacted by the pandemic, and those who continue to be impacted by changes to the early years system. This will also be helpful in the planning for and response to future comparable disruptions.

The [COVID-19 Inquiry](#) offers one way to ensure lessons are learned. Save the Children UK, alongside Just for Kids Law and the Children's Rights Alliance for England, participated as a Core Participant in Module 2 of the public inquiry, exploring core UK decision-making and political governance. Hearings took place in late 2023 and showed that children were failed by high-level decision making, with no responsible person for children's rights, nor appropriate structures to ensure the impact of policies on children were being acknowledged. When public hearings started and [Every Story Matters](#) launched, children were unable to participate. Plans for how children's voices will be considered as part of the inquiry have taken time to come together, with the tender for the research only starting in early 2024.



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We hope that the Inquiry will recognise this failure and will deepen its understanding of the impact on children in a future children's module. Only if we fully understand the immediate and long-term impact of the pandemic on families of babies and young children experiencing poverty, and what this may mean for policy and practice going forward, can we ensure that we are better equipped for future events that may disrupt life in similar ways. Save the Children UK, Children's Rights Alliance for England and Just for Kids Law wrote an [open letter](#) in 2023 urging the Covid-inquiry to ensure:

- That children's voices are heard, particularly those who experience inequalities and discrimination and were thus disproportionately impacted.
- That children are listened to in appropriate, child-focussed and trauma-informed ways, using best practice for children's participation.
- That the findings inform the scope of the children's module of the inquiry scheduled for 2025.

