

Impact of Covid

Key Evidence in the UK

UK Wide

Co-SPACE Study

The [Co-SPACE](#) Study from Oxford University tracked parents, children and young people's mental health during the pandemic, including follow ups until 2023. Different surveys focused the impact on the mental health of children aged 4-16 and their parents, and the experiences of parents of children aged 2-4 years.

Covid Inquiry

The [UK COVID-19 Inquiry](#) is examining the UK's response to pandemic. The inquiry is ongoing, and evidence continues to be presented and can be accessed online. Save the Children, alongside Just for Kids Law and the Children's Rights Alliance for England, [participated in Module 2 of the Inquiry, which explored high level decision making](#). The specific impact on children across the UK will be explored in a future module from 2025, following extensive research with children and young people throughout 2024.

Covid Babies

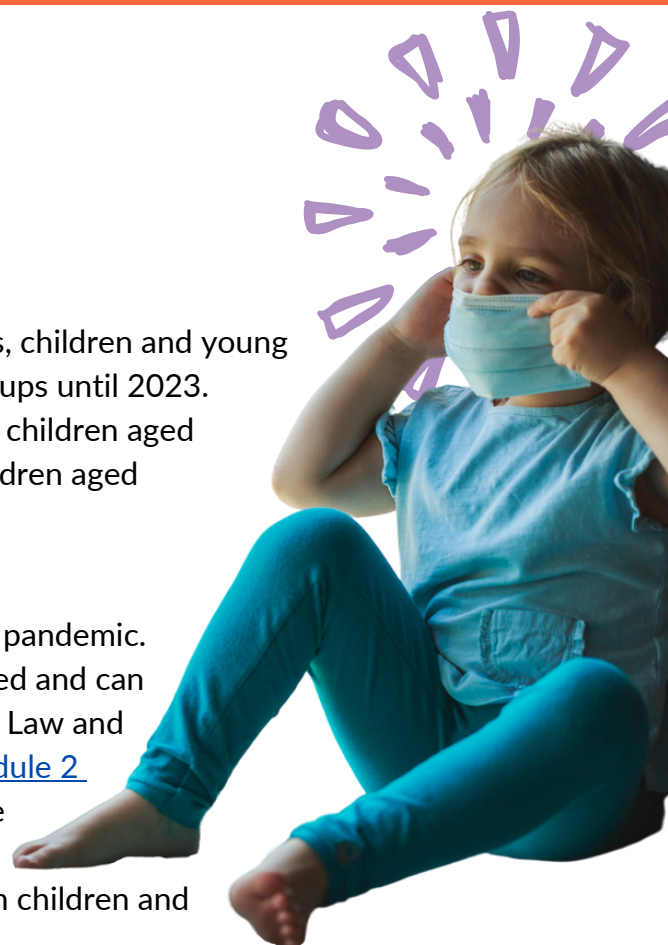
[Covid Babies](#) provides a valuable insight into the experiences of pregnancy, birth and early parenting during the pandemic and is particularly insightful in relation to how risks were considered at the time, and how quickly practices that were well established for reducing adverse outcomes for new mothers and their babies were discarded to minimise the transmission risk of the new virus.

Social Distancing and Development Study

The [Social Distancing and Development](#) team from Oxford Brookes, University of Oxford, University of Leeds, University of Warwick and University of East Anglia investigated factors influencing young children's cognitive and social and emotional skills during the pandemic.

Play Observatory

[A National Observatory](#) of Children's Play Experiences During COVID-19 was a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, running from October 2020 to March 2022, bringing together researchers from UCL Institute of Education, the School of Education at the University of Sheffield, and The Bartlett Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at UCL. It was also conducted in partnership with Great Ormond Street Hospital, The British Library and the Young V & A with whom the team co-curated an [online exhibition](#).



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England

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's socioemotional well-being and attainment during the Reception Year, Education Endowment Foundation

[This report](#) assesses the impact of the closure of early years settings on children's educational and socioemotional development, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The report aims to understand how children entering Reception in September 2020 experienced their start of school. It also analyses the impact of the interrupted early years provision on attainment and the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged and not-disadvantaged children.

Scotland

CEYRIS Study

In Scotland, Public Health Scotland conducted the COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey ([CEYRIS](#)) in four rounds between June/July 2020 and 2023. Reports for the first three rounds are available. It aimed to capture in a timely manner the impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of young children aged 2-11 years and their families. This online survey covered children's emotions and wellbeing, children's interactions with others, children's play and activities, their use of green and outdoor spaces, bereavement, childcare and educational settings, as well as the experiences of parents and carers. Using pre-pandemic baseline data, the study demonstrated that the longer the disruption due to the pandemic continued, the greater the impact on wellbeing. The study was further able to demonstrate that families with a lower income (under £30k a year) were more negatively impacted than families with a higher income; and that this gap widened with time, evidencing the disproportionate impact on families experiencing poverty and low income.



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Wales

Delphi Study

The Welsh Government commissioned research to examine the impact of COVID-19 on children under five in the [Delphi Study](#), which also explores the differences in impact between socio-demographic groups. It identified that children who suffered bereavement due to COVID-19, children with additional learning needs, children experiencing low income or poverty, and children whose parents had long COVID were most impacted by the pandemic. Children were impacted in their social and emotional, cognitive, speech and language, and physical domains; with the social and emotional and speech and language domain the most frequently impacted.

To mitigate this adverse impact, different strategies were recommended across the domains, with common threads: a focus on play (particularly social and outdoor play), a positive home learning environment and family learning, an increase in (universal) early childhood education and care opportunities, and giving young children opportunities to speak.

Insights from Save the Children

Save the Children focused on the impact of the pandemic from the outset and ensured that children and parents of the youngest children had their voices heard. [The Life under Lockdown](#) report traces children's experiences, arguing for a need to link boosting family incomes with support for children's early learning, while ensuring that children are part of national conversations about responding to and recovering from the pandemic.

Research undertaken for the COVID Inquiry failed to consider the experiences of children and young people. Together with several charities, NGOs and civil society groups, Save the Children advocated for the experiences and voices of children to be included. There is now a module on children and young people planned from 2025.

In the meantime, Save the Children, alongside Just for Kids Law and the Children's Rights Alliance for England, have participated as a Core Participant on behalf of the Children's Rights Organisations in Module 2 of the Inquiry, which focused on high-level decision making. In September 2023, [What About the Children](#) reported how the pandemic had impacted children's rights, specifically in relation to their right to be heard, to education and to play, and to be safe.

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Through evidence heard at the inquiry, we found [systemic failures in the structures to include children in decision making](#). For example, no one was responsible for children at the Cabinet Table, and there were insufficient systems and voices to ensure children's voices and human rights. We want to ensure that, as a nation, the failings to children during the COVID-19 pandemic are acknowledged, rectified, and lessons are learnt to not repeat mistakes with future generations.

When lockdown was announced, Save the Children adapted its practice work to respond to the pandemic. Funding was made available for Emergency Response Grants to families of young children experiencing a financial crisis or hardship. Resources and information to support early learning and play at home were also provided to families in the form of Early Learning Packs. The report, [Supporting Children and Families Through Covid](#) explores the learning from the emergency response grants which supported over 7,000 families. [Dropped into a Cave](#) explored how families with young children experienced lockdown by speaking directly to parents who had received an emergency response grant in Scotland. Since the pandemic, [The Summer of Play](#) and The Winter of Play have supported play opportunities, particularly for children who have missed out on play. In Scotland, a [Play Well Outdoors pack](#) was produced and distributed.

Gaps in the Evidence

Evidence is still emerging as to the long-term impact on children; both those who were born and/or lived through the pandemic, and those born after. Early indications are that the pandemic is continuing to impact on both groups.

This includes exploring how social and economic inequalities continue to widen and whether some of this can be apportioned to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. At the same time, there is an opportunity to examine which post-pandemic interventions demonstrate signs of success in reducing inequalities for specific groups.



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It would also be of interest to scrutinise in more detail how decisions were made to offer some children places in early education and childcare settings during the pandemic and others not. While there was a policy focus on “vulnerable” children, these were often missing from educational settings. Instead, childcare and schools remained open mainly for the children of key workers. However, even for children who attended educational settings, this may not have provided any benefit as for equity reasons little or no formal learning took place. Where places were offered to vulnerable groups of children and not taken up, it would be relevant to explore what the barriers to uptake were, particularly for families experiencing poverty.

Further evidence could be obtained on the specific experience of fathers during the pandemic, particularly during their partner’s pregnancy, birth and early parenting. Similarly, where parents were separated, this presented particularly challenging circumstances during the pandemic and may have contributed to estrangement and a general devaluation of the role of fathers.

Crucially, routines were disrupted during the pandemic, resulting in different habits such as going outside less or not accessing services, that continue after the end of the pandemic. Further research is needed to identify the scale of impact as well as how this has specifically affected children experiencing poverty.

