

Impact of Covid

Why Focus on the Impact of Covid?

Babies and young children were adversely affected by the restrictions of COVID-19 pandemic measures at a developmentally foundational time, with ongoing consequences. It is therefore paramount that we understand the complex impact of the pandemic on the youngest children so that learning can be taken that both informs support for children and families now, and future responses to similar crisis situations.

There is clear evidence that in general, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities for those on the lowest incomes, for some minority ethnic groups and for children facing food insecurity. The pandemic has also caused some families to experience poverty for the first time, and support may have been delayed as services were significantly cut back or adjusted.

For the youngest children, the pandemic happened at a key time for their development, a time where they would normally rely on extended family, friends and access a range of services regularly. Curtailing access to a wider community, support and services may have a lasting and ongoing impact on young children and their families.

[Research by the Parent Infant Foundation and Institute of Health Visiting](#) found that in 2022, more babies and young children experienced stresses and adversity, while they also had less access to positive activities than before the pandemic.

It has also been shown that more generally, the youngest children have been most affected by pandemic measures, both in relation to [early learning, language and numeracy skills and on social and emotional development](#).

- In England 2020/21, the proportion of children who gained a good level of development at the end of their Reception year was [13% smaller](#) than in 2018/19, although for 2021/22 it has picked up to almost pre-pandemic levels for the same age cohort.
- This development is mirrored in Scottish data, where 2020/21 statistics showed a drop with 2021/22 statistics picking up to pre pandemic levels.
- Child development outcomes for [two to two-and-a-half-year-olds for 2021/22 in England](#) however, are lower than pre-pandemic levels by almost one percentage point.



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Both in Scotland and England the data is based on teacher assessments with a pressure to demonstrate good performance which means this data must be viewed with caution. Qualitative feedback from settings indicates that there is a significant and continued degree of absenteeism and behavioural difficulties which both continue to impact on learning.

The pandemic brought unequal housing and living conditions into sharp exposure, for example, with 20% of low-income households experiencing overcrowding during lockdown compared to 3% of high-income households (Oppenheim, 2021). Many children lacked sufficient desk space during lockdowns. Similarly, access to gardens and green spaces is unequally distributed which meant that children living in poverty tended to be more restricted in access to outdoor and green spaces.

While a lot of research was conducted to understand the impact of the pandemic on children especially in relation to school closures and educational outcomes, the focus was overwhelmingly on older children who were able to respond to written surveys or participate in interviews. The experience of babies and young children was rarely captured or properly understood.

