

UK: COVID-19 & children's play ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Summary

This note has been prepared at the request of the Play Safety Forum 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 outdoorspaces 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. 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.

What is the risk from COVID in the outdoors?

The risk of COVID infection is much lower outdoors than indoors

What is the risk to adults posed by children?

Current evidence is that adults are more likely to be infected by other adults than by children.

Unintended consequences of the 'war' against COVID-19

There has been a failure to properly assess the risks of collateral damage to children and adolescents

Conclusions

During the present crisis measures have been applied which severely restrict the freedom of children and adolescents. Little consideration appears to have been given to children's welfare outside of the impact on education. Play, as has often been the case, has been forgotten or side-lined, yet there is copious scientific evidence of its importance for development. In contrast, there is little evidence that permitting children to play outside will increase risk in any significant way providing common sense measures are maintained.

As has been said:

"Eliminating risk isn't possible. Life isn't like that. But even if it were possible, eliminating risk would be a mistake, because the costs of doing this would be too high...."

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Links

- [1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/20/07/uk-covid-19-childrens-play>
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