

## News links from April 2020

### Mental Health Surveys

A survey conducted by the youth charity Young Minds into the mental health impact of the pandemic crisis found that:

- 83% agreed that the pandemic had made their mental health worse (32% said “much worse”; 51% said “a bit worse”)
- Among the respondents who were accessing mental health support in the lead-up to the crisis, 74% said that they were still getting some level of mental health support, while 26% were not.
- Respondents reported that face-to-face calls with friends (72%), watching TV/films (72%), exercise (60%) and learning new skills (59%) were helpful for their mental health during this time.
- 66% of respondents agreed that watching or reading the news was unhelpful for their mental health.

[See the full report](#)

The University of Oxford has set up a research project, called Co-SPACE, aiming to track children and young people's mental health throughout the crisis to identify how their mental health can best be protected. Professor Cathy Creswell said, “At this point, we know very little about what might be most effective in the current context of COVID-19. We hope to have more than 10,000 parents and carers across the UK complete the new online survey. Their responses will help us really understand how families are coping and what support could make all the difference to children, young people and their families at this time”.

[More details here.](#)

### Children: hidden victims of the pandemic

As we approach the 7th week of lockdown in the UK, there are concerns that children are falling through the cracks in many different ways.

At the beginning of April The Lancet highlighted the plight of children in temporary accommodation ([read more here](#)), while the Guardian reported a potential rise in online sexual abuse offences as the National Crime Agency released figures showing that there are at least 300,000 people in the UK who pose a sexual threat to children ([more here](#)).

The lockdown has also seen an alarming rise in the instances of domestic abuse as victims are forced into close confinement with their abusers. This was highlighted by SafeLives, the charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse who predict a potential doubling of the number of victims of domestic abuse, with an inevitable impact on children who live in those households. [Read more here](#)

And with a reported drop in A&E admissions for children with other complaints, there's concern that parents are keeping children away from A&E assuming that the symptoms are caused by COVID-19 or because they are afraid of catching the virus. [Read the article here.](#)

### School Food Vouchers

There was welcome news in Wales as £33m was set aside to give eligible children £19.50 per week in money, food or vouchers ([read more](#)) at the same time as worrying reports were coming through about delays to food vouchers in England. A BBC report in mid-April ([here](#)) cited system problems due to the huge demand, and further reported at the end of the month ([here](#)) that the problems persisted even after the system had been rebuilt. Error messages and long waits are the norm, with users facing countless failed attempts to log on. Some schools have resorted to supplying emergency food parcels or buying their own vouchers to help affected families, and describe the system as “chaos” and “unnecessarily complicated”.

## Low number of “At Risk” children attending school

While the BBC reported that scientists were mixed in their opinions about the effectiveness of school closures in limiting the spread of COVID-19 ([see report here](#)), it emerged that a “worryingly low number” of vulnerable children who had been allocated a school place were attending. [Read the report](#)

Later in April the Dept of Education reported that on one day in England - 17 April - just 5% of pupils officially classed as vulnerable attended school, thus confirming the anecdotal evidence that these pupils are just not turning up. [Read the Guardian article](#).

Being in school can keep vulnerable children safe and ease pressure on families, which is why such children can continue attending despite schools being closed for other pupils. These low attendance rates are worrying professionals working to protect these children.

## Long-term effects on BMI of prolonged gaming in children

Several newspapers reported on research that suggested that children who play lots of video games are at greater risk of overweight later on. The study was the first to look at the potential effect of video gaming on children’s BMI over time, and results revealed those who regularly played video games as a young child had a higher BMI nine years later, compared with those who didn’t. Scientists studied the health and behaviour of more than 16,000 UK youngsters first at the age of five, then at seven and 14.

The researchers pointed out that obesity is complex and that this is just one small piece of the puzzle. They highlighted the lack of advertising control within games and said that youngsters need protection from being encouraged, whilst gaming, to drink large quantities of unhealthy products. [Read more](#)

## How effective is health marketing?

**In 2016 Public Health England ran a campaign called “Sugar Smart” which aimed to raise awareness of the sugar content of food and drink. Researchers investigated its impact on the intake of sugars in children, aiming to find out whether the campaign was effective in altering dietary behaviour. They found that the campaign did have a beneficial impact but due to various factors that impact was not sustained longer-term.**

**Parents want to reduce their child’s sugar intake but societal barriers and confusion over which sources of sugars to avoid hamper efforts to change.**

[Read the Report](#)

## Increasing Physical Activity in Schools and Colleges - what works?

Public Health England have updated their resource document which sets out what is effective in schools and colleges in increasing physical activity. The document brings together key guidance, policy documents and local examples to help schools and colleges develop and implement effective evidence-based approaches utilising eight key principles.

[Download the document](#)

## Physical Education in lockdown

Yorkshire Sport Foundation’s Dan Wilson and Grant Huddlestone of Birmingham City University consider the impact of non professional “PE” offerings and suggest some alternatives.

[Read the full article](#).