

**Title:** Indirect Impact of Covid-19 on Children

**Tags:**

Psychobehavioral, pediatrics, ID

**Summary:**

Children seem to be less affected than adults by the direct effects of Covid-19 infection, but the pandemic has brought forth other health risks to the pediatric population. In this Hippo Education short, Sol Behar interviews Oakland, CA based primary care pediatricians Celine Sparrow and Katie D'Harlingue about the indirect impact of Covid-19 on children. Topics covered include home school and academic achievement, mental health issues, and nutrition/ food insecurity.

**Marketing Assets**

- Please identify guest Twitter/Facebook/Instagram handles here: \_\_n/a\_\_
- Please identify brief points or message that you would like to highlight, and the marketing team will work that message into character constraints

Covid-19 has effects on children that go way beyond the direct medical effects of the virus. Kids are facing food insecurity, mental health, and academic challenges.

**Shownotes:**

General Medical diagnoses:

- delay in seeing specialists, delay in elective surgical procedures
- late presentation of common diseases due to fear of going to clinic/ED-- late presentation of asthma, appendicitis, etc.
- delayed diagnoses-- oncological
- Kids with developmental delays- less access to PT, OT, speech therapy may put them at risk for worsening spasticity or aspiration. There may also be lack of access or delay shipments of essential formulas and diaper delivery, lack of access to home nursing
- delay in getting vaccines-- risk of outbreaks of other vaccine preventable diseases
- Anecdotally, some illnesses seem to have improved, such as constipation, due to children no longer withholding at school and asthma, due to decreased exposure to other viruses.
- increased injuries due to inappropriate supervision of kids while parents are working at home

Nutrition:

- Food scarcity: we are screening every one of our patients for food insecurity and nearly all respond yes to food insecurity. This may be due to lack of access to meals at school, where in America, 20.2 million free lunches and 11.7 million free breakfasts are served every day. In addition, grocery stores have empty shelves and low-resource families more commonly live in food deserts and have more difficulty accessing food delivery online
- Obesity: limited inability to go outside due to shelter in place orders. Challenge with families already living in neighborhoods without nearby parks and without cars to get out into a safe space in nature for a walk. Increase in armed theft and fear of going outside due to potential covid exposure. Difficulty keeping structure to snack times/meal time, at risk of constantly snacking all day

Responses in our community: Oakland Unified School district is distributing meals to families at their school sites, organizations are delivering meals to covid+ families to avoid spread in grocery stores, some clinic sites have organized food pantries.

Advice to families: Great time to quit soda to avoid an extra visit to a grocery store. Advise families that they go outside as long as they wear a face covering and respect social distancing. Example exercise could be taking a walk to the bus stop every morning to maintain a routine, having a daily dance party at home

### Academic:

- exacerbates/highlights the pre-existing inequities among schools and educational experiences-- private schools immediately pivoted to online the next day, public schools took a lot longer for varying reasons-- getting technology to all the kids, -- i.e. in Oakland, waited for teacher's union to write new contract and so didn't start for a few weeks
- Tech gap in families and low-literacy parents -- schools are giving laptops/wifi
- online classrooms are hard to use, parents who don't speak English/aren't tech savvy can't use it, no printers (even if do send packets), parents not empowered/able to email teacher if speak different language
- concern for dramatic increase in screen time among kids
- many kids don't have a quiet place to focus on their schoolwork, esp hard with siblings, kids with ADHD, etc
- teachers are reaching out to high risk kids for 1:1 zoom sessions, etc
- parents aren't teachers
- learning difficulties/IEP process -- how to get access to IEP services virtually
- many schools are doing pass/fail grades or even no grades this semester, making homework optional
- message from educators: most important thing is for children to feel safe, secure, and loved during this time. Remember that all kids will lose these few months of education, all over the world.

### Mental Health:

- increased parental stress due to fear of contracting virus, social isolation, losing work/reduced hours creating financial stress, exacerbation of underlying poverty and other preexisting stresses
- parental stress/home confinement leading to increased rates of child abuse and domestic violence -- even if not physical violence, huge increase in family discord, more verbal and emotional abuse
- worsened anxiety and depression, lack of access to mental health providers, lack of privacy (especially teens when talking to therapist in home environment)
- loss of broader family community-- not able to see grandparents, etc that might have been a part of daily life before
- kids depend on routine and knowing what to anticipate about their life-- -The consistency of schedules, predictable rules and consequences, and set expectations teach children how to behave, develop self-discipline and impulse control and, importantly, a sense of safety and control.
- now filled with uncertainty, makes them feel anxious, scared, insecure
- missing important moments of life -- birthdays, graduations, summer camps, etc-- try to celebrate virtually, celebrate big at home

-loss of innocence of childhood-- even privileged kids in this era growing up with a lot of trauma-- increase in natural disasters due to climate change, toxic political environment-- anecdote--kids in nor-cal pulled out of school for wildfires every year, then blackouts to prevent fires, now COVID-- school supposed to be reliable place of safety, now can't trust school anymore

-kids of essential workers (i.e. pediatricians!) may be affected more as they do not have their parent (s) at home, may understand the risk that their parents are taking, worried about parent's health, etc

What to do to help kids mental health:

-important to maintain routines for kids, maintain same bedtimes-- especially for little kids; creates sense of security, like the adult has situation under control

-judge age/temperament of child to base how much to share with the child about COVID

- don't watch news about COVID around young kids

-be sure to ask kids how they are feeling, give space for acknowledging that they are feeling sad, let them mourn the loss of these few months of school, loss of bday parties, etc.

Validate their feelings. Tell them that you are sad too.

-Emphasize with them that they are not stuck at home, they are safe at home.

-help them connect with friends and family virtually

-Resources-- Sesame street, online books that can print out that are about covid-- show notes

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