

Briefing: impact of COVID-19 on child health services

July 2021

Like services across the NHS, child health services are currently under significant pressure due to the impact of the pandemic.

Pressure on Emergency Departments (ED)

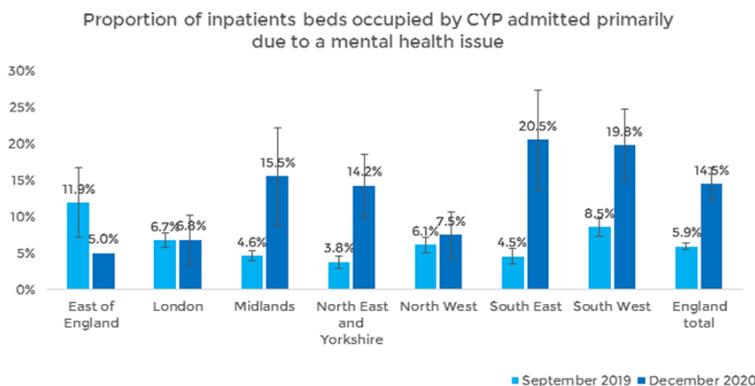
We have seen significant pressure on paediatric A&E departments in recent weeks, due in part to a rise in respiratory infections usually seen in winter.

Many of the presentations are driven by new parents - who have not seen fever before in their child due to suppressed infection rates during lockdown.

As a result, RCPCH issued guidance for parents about when to seek medical attention, along with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM).

Increased demand for mental health services

The impact of the pandemic on children and young people's health has been well documented. Paediatric beds are also under significant pressure due to the uptick



in children and young people with serious mental health problems - doubling compared to 2019.

Additionally, 38% of respondents said they did not have effective joint pathways with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in their local area.

Impact on paediatric outpatients

At the peak in January 2021, **26% of services** reported outpatient service cancellations. By the end of data collection on 26th February, **15% of services** were still reporting this.

Virtual consultations

Respondents' top concern to the data collection project about virtual consultations was missing safeguarding issues. **81% of survey respondents** said they were concerned about missing safeguarding issues in virtual consultations. Furthermore, **78% and 76% respectively** were concerned about missing other health issues and problems for patients in accessing technology – the so-called 'digital divide.'

Redeployment of paediatricians to adult services

Paediatricians have been redeployed to adult services over the course of the pandemic.

In the second peak of COVID-19 in January 2021, **13% of services reported paediatric consultants** were redeployed to adult services.

46% and 11% of services reported community child health trainees were redeployed in the first and second waves of the pandemic respectively. This is particularly significant given the role of community paediatricians in identifying safeguarding issues.

Impact of the pandemic on paediatric workforce

In addition to longstanding workforce pressures, the paediatric workforce has been under a huge amount of pressure, with over **15% of services reporting absence due to stress** and **45% of clinical leads reporting concerns about future absences**. As across the whole NHS workforce, staff need to be supported to recover from stress and burnout.

It will be some time before we understand what the full impact of the pandemic on children and young people's health services will be. But we do know that in addition to the **wider health and wellbeing implications** of the pandemic on them, the consequences will be far-reaching.

Calls to Government

In order ensure child health services and their workforce can meet the demand the current and anticipated demand, RCPCH is calling on the Government to:

- **Implement an overarching child health strategy**, multi-departmental in approach; to help ensure existing health inequalities are not entrenched by COVID-19. This will also help to embed a child health in all policies approach to policy making.
- **Provide ring-fenced funding of CAMHS and inpatient paediatric mental health services** that reflects local service demand.
- **Urgently increase funding to Local Authorities Provide sufficient funding for Local Authorities** commensurate to local population need. This must include restoring the **£1 billion of real-terms cuts** to the public health grant since 2015. Future investment in public health provision should increase at the same rate as NHS funding and be allocated based on population health needs.

For further information please contact:

Caitlin Plunkett-Reilly, Public Affairs and Campaigns Lead
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, London, WC1X 8SH
Tel: 020 7092 6006 | Email: caitlin.plunkett-reilly@rcpch.ac.uk

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