State of Child Health 6 - Health conditions of childhood

This chapter looks at some common conditions among children and young people.

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Table of contents

- Asthma
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Disability and additional learning needs
- Epilepsy

Asthma

Number of emergency hospital admissions for asthma for children and young people under 19 years of age

Key messages

- Asthma is the commonest long-term medical condition in the UK. One in 10 to 11 children and young people in the UK has asthma.
- The UK has one of the highest prevalence, emergency admission and death rates for childhood asthma in Europe.
- There is wide geographical variation in emergency asthma admission rates for children across the UK.
- Most emergency admissions are preventable, with high-quality management (including the use of asthma plans) and early intervention to address deterioration in control.

Key actions
Strengthen research into the underlying causes of asthma and ways to prevent it. 
Ensure full implementation of NICE and SIGN asthma guidelines across the UK. 
Improve asthma education for children, families and healthcare professionals. Improve 
training for healthcare professionals in working with young people. 
Deliver school responsibilities in relation to children with asthma (eg implementation of 
statutory guidance in England compared with other nations, etc.).

Cancer

Proportion of children (0–14 years) surviving five years following a diagnosis of cancer

Key messages

- Despite continuing advances in treatment and consequent improvements in survival rates, cancer remains the most frequent medical cause of death for children in the UK.
- The proportion of children surviving five years following a cancer diagnosis has doubled since the 1970s. This increase is likely to be due to improvements in treatment and supportive care.
- The increases in survival for many of the principal types of childhood cancer have occurred in parallel with clinical trials in the same period of time.
- The UK has relatively low mortality rates compared with high-income countries worldwide, although there is some evidence that survival rates are poorer for some cancers than the best in Europe.

Key actions

- Collect comparable data across the UK to give a UK-wide and country-level overview of cancer incidence, mortality and survival.
- Re-establish the ability to analyse UK-wide data on childhood cancer routinely.
- Ensure children and young people are fully involved in decisions about their cancer treatment and care.
- Strengthen research into childhood cancers, including ensuring wide access to clinical trials.

Diabetes

Proportion of children with diabetes meeting recommended targets for blood glucose control

Key messages
• Type 1 diabetes is an increasingly common childhood condition affecting rising numbers of children and young people in the UK.
• Poor management of the condition in childhood can have severe long-term health implications.
• There has been an increase in the proportion of children and young people in England and Wales with HbA1c levels below the target of 58mmol/mol since 2010-11.
• Those from deprived or black and minority ethnicity backgrounds have poorer diabetes control.

Key actions

• Strengthen research into the underlying causes of diabetes and ways to manage it effectively.
• Collect comparable data across the UK to give a UK-wide overview of diabetes care and management.
• Ensure joined-up care which meets the wider needs of children with diabetes, including appropriate transition to adult diabetes services.
• Ensure full implementation of updated NICE guidance for HbA1c levels across the UK, along with the recommendations from the NPDA regarding care management.
• Improve diabetes education for children, young people, families and healthcare and educational professionals to decrease stigma and discrimination.

Disability and additional learning needs

Percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) / Additional Support Needs (ASN)

Key messages

• Each country in the UK has its own statutory provisions and systems to identify and support children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties.
• In the UK there are currently between 14% and 23% of children and young people identified as having a special or additional educational need.
• There is a clear link between low income and prevalence of a special/additional educational need being identified.
• Children and young people with a special or additional educational need must be supported through appropriate statutory provisions and consistent data capture.

Key actions

• Ensure statutory provisions are in place for children and young people with SEND and ASN, in particular those with additional medical needs.
• Strengthen comparable data capture for SEND and ASN across all nations, and use a universal measure of recognised vocabulary.
• Implement Disability Matters across all educational, healthcare and social care settings.

Epilepsy
Number of emergency hospital admissions for epilepsy for children and young people under 19 years of age

**Key messages**

- Epilepsies are a complex spectrum of conditions. Delivering high-quality diagnosis, treatment, and support can all be challenging. The Epilepsy 12 audit shows areas of progress across the UK, but also the need for continued improvement.
- There is wide geographical variation in emergency epilepsy admission rates for children across the UK.
- High-quality epilepsy care requires a holistic approach that includes psychological and practical support in addition to medical expertise, plus early recognition and support of additional needs (including mental health and special educational needs).

**Key actions**

- Strengthen research into the underlying causes of epilepsy and ways to prevent it.
- Develop new methods of collecting and sharing data to facilitate delivery of more integrated, person-centred care.
- Ensure joined-up care which meets the wider needs of children with epilepsy, including timely access to mental health services.
- Ensure full implementation of NICE and SIGN guidelines across the UK and the recommendations from the Epilepsy12 programme.
- Increase use of the epilepsy passport or similar patient-held care plans.
- Improve epilepsy education for children, young people, families and healthcare and educational professionals to decrease stigma and discrimination.

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