



# Briefing: State of Child Health in the UK

May 2021

## Summary

Last year, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) published [State of Child Health 2020](#). It showed a bleak picture; worsening

## State of Child Health 2020

Last March, just before COVID-19 took hold, RCPCH launched [State of Child Health 2020](#), which considered the trends in child health outcomes across nearly 30 indicators. The data showed a worrying trend in child health outcomes, and as such, we warned that the UK was [failing a generation of young people](#).



## What we don't know

In addition to not yet having the most up to date data sets, the data we do have is largely from before the pandemic. This is because of the lag between collecting, analysing and publishing data.

Therefore, it's likely that most of the data we do have does not reflect the impact of the pandemic; because it was collected before it started. For example, the most recent data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is from autumn 2019. It shows an [increase](#) in the proportion of 4-5 year olds recorded as overweight or obese in England from 22.6% to 23%. Again, there is no comparable data for the devolved nations. That the rate was increasing before the pandemic means it's reasonable to extrapolate that the rate has likely increased further in a year where children have been less active, and poverty has increased. This is due to the [inequalities](#) we see in obesity rates between those children living in the most and least deprived areas.

## Impact of COVID-19

Whilst children and young people have overwhelmingly been spared the worst of the clinical impact of COVID-19, the response to the pandemic has had far-reaching negative effects on their health and wellbeing.

This is largely because schools play a significant role in the health and wellbeing of all children and young people, and a pivotal role in identifying vulnerable children, providing the setting from which children can access health surveillance, support and advice, as well as individual and group therapeutic programmes. Widespread school closure have reduced children and young people's access to these health benefits, and also allowed vulnerable children to slip under the radar.

It will also mean we have incomplete data in coming years over some child health indicators, as some data is collected through schools. One example is the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP).

COVID-19 has both compounded and exposed the inequalities entrenched in health. The excess mortality rates due to the virus in the most socioeconomically deprived areas are proof of this. Deprived communities have borne the brunt of the wider negative impacts of the pandemic.

## Child poverty

Children living in poverty are [more likely](#) to have the low birth weight, poor physical health like obesity and some chronic conditions and mental health problems. The health impacts of growing up in poverty are significant and follow children across their life course.

Before the pandemic, [over 4 million children](#) were living in poverty. Whilst we await the data, with growing unemployment, a recession, and the likely long-term health



## Calls to Government

In order to ensure all children get the best start in life, enjoy the best possible health and child health outcomes are levelled up across the country, we are calling on Government to undertake the following actions. These calls were made in State of Child Health 2020, but as we recover from the pandemic, these calls must be implemented urgently. Our children and young people cannot afford to wait.

## About RCPCH

The [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health \(RCPCH\)](#) is the membership body for paediatricians, representing more than 19,500 child health professionals in the UK and abroad. We are responsible for the training, examinations and professional standards of paediatricians across the country, and we use our research and experience to develop recommendations to promote better child health outcomes.

Our mission is to transform child health through knowledge, innovation and expertise and to ensure that children are at the heart of the health service.

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