

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19  
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

COV 90

Ymateb gan: Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Hywel Dda

Welsh Parliament  
Children, Young People and Education  
Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak  
on children and young people in Wales

COV 90

Response from: Hywel Dda University Hospital

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## **24. Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg - LANSIO YMGYNGHORIAD ; Children, Young People and Education Committee - Consultation Response**

Hywel Dda University Health Board has considered the impact of COVID-19 on its most vulnerable children and young people, and noted the following:

### School Nursing

- The School Nurses have spoken to some children during lockdown who have felt that it has been “OK”. Most children say they cope better when it is nice enough to sit outside for a while; all say the work and virtual interaction with schools is very beneficial.
- A lot of children who can access the hubs in school are not going, as parents are reporting they are afraid, despite the benefit to their children.
- School Nurses are concerned at the emotional impact of COVID-19. They anticipate we will see a lot of children needing counselling when schools are open and a more normal life resumes. Older children they have spoken to are missing physical interaction; younger children are confused, and all are worried about what happens if this does not end. School Nurses are concerned that the support they are able to provide children remotely, particularly teens who access the school nurse for emotional support, is not at the level children are used to.
- The uncertainty around the current situation is having an impact on children and families; finances are often not covering what is needed. Those families who are accessing the free school meals see it as a much needed lifeline.
- The school nursing service continue to do health assessments, participate in multi-agency meetings and child protection conferences. They have however seen an increase in initial child protection conferences.

### Paediatric Palliative Care Play Specialist

- The Palliative Care Play Specialist works with children from diagnosis through to death. As this work primarily consists of face to face therapeutic play therapy, COVID-19 has significantly changed this practice.
- The impact of COVID-19 infection is also significant for palliative care children and young people, and in order to best support the children, the service now provides psychological support, play and holistic support by FaceTime, phone calls, letters and text messages.

- The Play Specialist has found that the children and young people are worried. They discuss what their biggest worries are, how they feel hearing about coronavirus, people wearing masks and the impact of not being in school. Children and young people have vivid imaginations, which can lead to unnecessary anxiety in times of stress. What is important is finding a healthy balance between answering questions openly without overwhelming them with too much information; so the Paediatric Palliative Care Play Specialist provides age and stage appropriate information.
- Children and young people also report on overhearing worrying conversations, so they try and answer openly and talk about the things they can do to help prevent illness, like washing hands and keeping themselves safe.
- The importance of continuing play and normal activities is emphasised, as play allows for emotional expression and promotes development. Normal routine is disrupted for the children and young people, which is also a huge factor in their anxiety. It is important to explain why routines have changed; using facts and reassurance and families are encouraged to continue with play and normal routines.
- Hospital changes and precautions are also discussed as the children and young people are wondering about these changes.
- Internet safety and the use of appropriate screen time has become a topic of conversation, not only with parents, but also with the children and young people. Checking on what games they are playing and who they are talking to is explored; parents are actively encouraged to engage and maintain oversight.
- To keep the children and young people entertained and happy, the Play Specialist is working closely with Dreams & Wishes, REACT, Belle's Story, Maisie Moo and Hywel Dda Health Charities in order to create experiences, surprises, resources and gift boxes for the children and young people; this provides them with a much needed boost. As each child and young person is individual, this is done on a personal level.
- The Play Specialist has arranged for food parcels to be delivered and the Scarlets Rugby Team deliver a care package to all the children and young people, with three chosen to have VIP visits 'social distancing', with very special gifts.

### Diabetes Services

- Initially, families were reluctant to call for advice in the first week or two until there was an escalation of the issue or when the message came from the government that the NHS was open for business. They report that anxiety levels in many families are heightened; this is often projected onto their child's condition.
- There have been more calls from families who have welcomed a listening ear and practical support at finding solutions to practical issues, such as deliveries of medicines.
- Families on special diets have been unable to get the special products in supermarkets, for example, gluten free products leading to dietary indiscretions.

- Children have been discharged from hospital very quickly, sometimes leaving the family feeling scared and rushed, and needing more support from other teams.
- Families are reporting poor routines, especially around sleep and mealtimes to dieticians; poor sleep has an effect on appetite and is linked to obesity.
- They further report that teenagers with diabetes are reported to be sleeping until 2-3pm, meals are disrupted making blood sugar control even harder. They are often over focusing on food throughout the day as there are fewer distractions. This could lead to poorer outcomes if poor control persists for some time.
- Grief over the loss of the rights of passage has been reported such as finishing GCSE, degrees, proms and planned school trips.

### Iechyd Da

- Iechyd Da works with vulnerable young people up to 25 years of age, across the counties of Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, who are not in school e.g. those who are not in mainstream education (alternative curriculum and electively home educated), those who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), Looked After Children and young people and care leavers, those who are supported by the Youth Offending Prevention Service, and those who are homeless or vulnerably housed.
- Due to COVID-19 and the need to redeploy some of the team to other key areas, coupled with changes in line with government guidelines as to how they are able to work with young people and their families whilst maintaining social distancing, the remaining team members adapted and adjusted their working practices.
- They are receiving referrals for young people who are finding lockdown challenging and also are experiencing additional life stresses, such as bereavement, parental separation and unstable housing. The referrals at this time have been for emotional health support.
- The team is focusing on:
  - Offering support utilising the technology available, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype and FaceTime
  - Collating emotional health packs, and has distributed 70 hard copies to young people across both counties, together with emailing copies to in excess of 35 colleagues and partner agencies in both counties. Packs have also been sent to colleagues in Pembrokeshire and Swansea, upon request.
  - Liaising with colleagues and services who are able to offer counselling services at this time. Both Coleg Sir Gar and Area 43 are accepting referrals for counselling.
  - Liaising with Local Authority colleagues and in Coleg Sir Gar regarding young people who are educated through alternative provision, electively home educated, and those who receive support from school based social workers and education welfare service.
  - Linking with colleagues to address the emotional health and well-being needs of Young Carers.

- Fulfilling all statutory duties through working closely with children services, youth support services and youth justice services.
- Pre-emptively holding discussions across both counties about how to manage the post lockdown transition for young people who are particularly vulnerable, for example, those at risk of offending behaviour, substance misuse issues, sexual health matters, CSE and missing person risks.

### Looked After Children

- The Looked After Children service is concerned that this is a difficult time for teenagers. Teenagers miss meeting up in groups and having social gatherings. Being confined to home, not doing team sports, no school, and loss of structure is emotionally and physically damaging for them.
- Information received suggests that young people and young adults are restarting to self-harm as a coping mechanism, due to anxiety with the current situation. They are also scared to attend GP or A&E because of the risk of infection, with in some instances, Health Visitors dropping antibiotics to the home.
- The Looked after Children Team, Health Visitors and School Nurses are carrying out health assessments by phone. They note that two young people have disclosed historical abuse; not something we would have anticipated previously, thinking that a face to face consultation would have been more likely to elicit that type of information. We wonder if it was easier to disclose as there was no eye contact with the person carrying out the assessment.

### A Parent's View

- A parent who is an employee has an 8 year old child.
- When school was first closed, he was fine about being at home, having lessons at home was a novelty. However, as time has gone on, mum is concerned that it may affect his mental health long term. He is really missing being around other children. While they do try face-timing other children during the week, it is definitely not the same and being physically around them; plus the length of time he gets to talk to other children isn't half the time he would get in school.
- The child has been doing the Joe Wicks PE classes for the majority of the days to keep active and has enjoyed that as it's live and knows that some of his friends are doing the same thing at the same time as him.
- Mum is concerned that the mental health of all children could be affected by this situation. It is a stressful, anxious time for most adults, and the children see this.
- Therapy colleagues who are parents, report pressure from some schools to complete set work. This has been especially noticed for essential service staff who are trying to work, sometimes from home and do home schooling all with one home computer. Some schools have been very understanding and supportive, others not so.