

## RESPECT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC!

IT'S TIME TO SEND CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL AND DAY CARE AGAIN!

In the early phases of COVID-19, pandemic countries reacted almost universally with school and day care closures in an attempt to halt the rapid spread of the disease. There is now "preliminary evidence that children and young people have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2" and a lower probability of being an infected contact. There is "weak evidence that children and young people play a lesser role in transmission of SARS-CoV-2 at a population level". They develop mild or even asymptomatic disease. This seems to be true even in the case of co-morbidities.

Severe paediatric forms of COVID-19 are as rare as other serious infection symptoms in children that do not cause schools to be closed. SARS-CoV-2 is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. According to the latest modelling studies, school, nursery and daycare closures have only had a very marginal impact on the spread COVID-19.

Despite the general scientific consensus that children play a smaller role in the spread of the virus than adults, children are paying an extraordinarily heavy tribute to the COVID-19 crisis: disruption of school education, increase in physical and moral abuse, disruption of vaccine protection and follow-up for chronic disease. Moreover, many children now suffer from a severe lack of outdoor physical activity.

As stated in the United Nations « Convention on the Rights of the Child » children have a right to enjoy education and should be provided with an environment that allows good physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

We thus call on our governments to take into account the best interests of the child and to reopen schools and day care to all children with precaution, including those with disabilities or chronic illnesses. In this endeavor authorities should be encouraged to see what has worked elsewhere and learn from countries that have already moved forward.

This reopening can be organized in a progressive manner by implicating children in basic rules of hygiene and by allowing for stable learning groups avoiding overcrowding of available spaces. It is essential to ensure that the most disadvantaged kids are not left aside. Teachers and educators should be encouraged to establish new teaching methods and to take advantage of green areas adjacent to schools or nurseries.

Likewise, we call for reopening of all playgrounds and parks in urban areas for children. It's the parent's responsibility to avoid large groups of adults. If necessary, access to these areas could be reserved for children and their companions.

As European primary care paediatricians we urge our state authorities to move forward in the best interest of children as soon as possible, to allow them to learn to live together without excessive fear of others, to open up to the world through play and learning, in contact with other children and responsible caregivers and by regaining access to nature and physical activities - always taking into account the risks of acquiring or spreading SARS-CoV-2.

On behalf of Executive Board of ECPCP  
 Dr.-Christine Magendie Assistant General Secretary

(1) Susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection amongst children and adolescents compared with adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis  
<https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.05.20.20108126>

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