

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2021

Impact of COVID-19 on

Children and Young People in

North East Lincolnshire

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Key Points

- Children and young people have been less affected by the COVID-19 infection itself than other age-groups, however have been disproportionately impacted by the social, educational and economic impacts of the pandemic. Young people already facing challenges have been the hardest hit and there is a concern about the widening of health inequalities.
- **Services** - Change from face to face services to phone / video calls have had some advantages, however clinicians have raised concerns regarding delayed diagnoses and identifying hidden harm in vulnerable children. Additionally, parents feel it is harder to get accurate information virtually and overwhelmingly prefer face to face appointments.
- **Pregnancy** - Partners not being able to attend scans and appointments and only stay for a limited time after birth has been one of the main concerns for pregnant women, in some cases women have felt pressure to leave hospital early which has impacted on breastfeeding initiation. There has also been an increase in postnatal depression.
- **Early Years** - Settling back into childcare, separation anxiety and regression in speech and language and toileting. Access to childcare for children from the most deprived areas is a concern. Personal, social and Emotional development is the biggest concern overall for this age-group.
- **Starting and developing well** - settling back into school/ transitioning to school, increased screen time and behaviour are the main issues.
- **Child Poverty** - over 1,000 NEL families used food banks each week in December. Food insecurity has increased during the pandemic, especially for families with 3 or more children.
- **Young carers** – there has been an increase in time spent caring and no respite for young carers, there has been an increase in referrals for mental health, a lack of school places during lockdowns and a struggle to access the internet for home learning.
- **Safeguarding** – there has been an increase in the complexity of cases for children known to children’s social care.

Children & Young People

Emerging Issues



Partners not being able to attend scans and appointments and only stay for a limited time after birth has been one of the main concerns for pregnant women, in some cases women have felt pressure to leave hospital early which has impacted on breastfeeding initiation. There has also been an increase in postnatal depression.



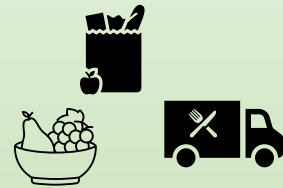
Increased screen time and behaviour are the main issues as children settle back into school.



There has been an increase in time spent caring and no respite for young carers, there has been an increase in referrals for mental health, a lack of school places during lockdowns and a struggle to access the internet for home learning.



Settling back into childcare, separation anxiety and regression in speech and language and toileting were an issue. Access to childcare for children from the most deprived areas is a concern.



Over 1,000 NEL families used food banks each week in December. Food insecurity has increased during the pandemic, especially for families with 3 or more children.



There has been an increase in the complexity of cases for children known to children's social care.

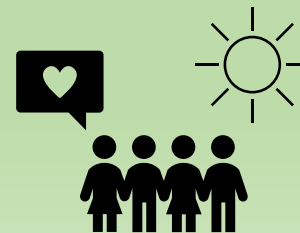
Ongoing Solutions



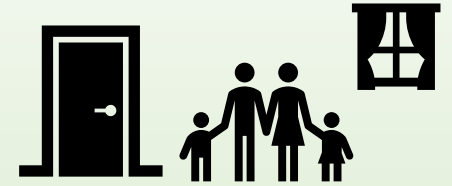
Children and young people services have been massively affected by the pandemic. Extensive work is being carried out across these services to mitigate the damage of COVID-19, but it will be some time before all services are back to full capacity.



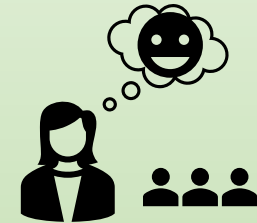
Change from face to face services to phone / video calls have had some advantages, however clinicians have raised concerns regarding delayed diagnoses and identifying hidden harm in vulnerable children. Additionally, parents feel it is harder to get accurate information virtually and overwhelmingly prefer face to face appointments.



Overall, the majority of 10 to 17 year olds said they are coping well with the challenges brought about by COVID-19, with the biggest challenge not being able to see their friends and family. Only a small proportion were really concerned about their exams being cancelled, although unsurprisingly this was more of a concern for older pupils.



Although there have been many negatives for children and young people, many reported that they feel more grateful for their life and the people around them, additionally many children felt positive about the extra time they have spent with their families.



Nationally, Some children in children's homes experienced improved mental health and reported feeling happier. Some staff used the time to improve their relationships with children and young people. However, some children reported feeling more anxious, felt isolated from friends leading to an increase in alcohol and drug use and self-harm.

Impacts of COVID-19 on services for children and young people

Therapies - NLaG

- The children and young people therapy service is provided by NLAG and consists of; Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Nutrition and Dietetic services.
- As a result of national guidance, the NLaG therapy service experienced a significant impact on it's ability to deliver routine care and support as staff were redeployed to support COVID-19 priorities. Urgent and vulnerable patients were prioritised and supported. As of April 2021 therapy staff are undertaking their full duties.
- The therapy service quickly converted to safe covid practices. Every patient was triaged, assessed and offered support via telephone, telehealth and/or face to face. In the summer of 2020 NLAG undertook a patient/carer questionnaire for working through the pandemic – the SALT questionnaire for the new video consultations and telephone consultations. Overall a positive response was received from this engagement with a minority of those that responded experiencing technology challenges.
- All referrals are individually assessed based on clinical need. New referrals are triaged according to urgency and urgent referrals are then prioritised and seen within relevant clinical urgent timescales. 100% of urgent patients are seen for first appointment within timescale. All other referrals who are triaged as non-urgent are risk assessed and seen within an assured safe period. All children on the caseload have a date which is their 'planned due date'.
- An impact that is emerging as we move out of lockdown and children return to schools/settings is not only a rise in referrals but a rise in need for input to EHCPs. This has a knock-on impact for the child and for capacity of the service to meet need.
- NLAG have reported an increase in EHCP requests across all service areas. This may reflect those children who were not in school over the last 12 months and now require additional support or had unidentified SEN needs. Potential risk to capacity due to rapid increase in demand for service.
- The SALT service is seeing an increase in number of referrals to the SEN mainstream caseload, alongside a rise in EHCP requests. For SALT there were 39 children on SEN mainstream caseload for Q4 2019-20, which has risen over the last 12 months to 63. Ongoing high numbers of children with EHCP requests anticipate that this will continue to climb.
- Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy have both reported an increase in the number of requests for EHCP.

Paediatrics: Acute hospital services, assessment unit, outpatients and community nursing services

- Staffing levels within paediatrics were, on the whole, manageable throughout the pandemic; a small proportion of paediatric staff were re-directed to adult services or from community to acute paediatric based care.
- The Paediatric Assessment Unit (PAU) based within A&E was re-located onto the Rainforest ward and due to covid distancing and space requirements this placed pressures on the availability of paediatric in-patient beds. Despite paediatric activity at the start of the pandemic being reduced the reduction in bed base was still a pressure and when restrictions began to lift, and confidence levels increased, the pressures became unmanageable and resulted in some children and young people's hospital care being diverted to other sites. This will necessitate investment in alternatives to hospital care such as the proposed hospital at home pilot as well as the continued out of hospital transformation to reduce inappropriate hospital attendances, admissions and outpatient follow ups.
- The cancellations and reductions in outpatient and clinic capacity created a backlog in some areas of care and has left paediatric clinics with longer than usual waiting lists for example substantial waits for the joint ASD screening clinic requiring additional clinics to be set up so that more children and young people can be seen.
- Lack of face-to-face contacts during this period and the move to 'virtual' consultations created concern amongst clinicians primarily regarding hidden harm in vulnerable children and the potential for delayed presentations of unwell children.
- However, whilst virtual consultations will never replace the need for some face-to-face appointments, they do have many advantages and in some cases are the preferred option. Lockdown has enabled planned digital / virtual innovations to be progressed at pace and Paediatrics are progressing the implementation of an all-in-one device for on-demand, remote medical examinations.

Impacts of COVID-19 on safeguarding

Children's Social Care, North East Lincolnshire

Short Term Impacts

Monthly contacts and referrals have been variable due to a number of factors, one of which is Covid. Police is the highest contact source. Spike in school contacts before Christmas and dropped after Christmas due to most pupils not attending school.

There was a peak in referrals in September 2020 and then again at beginning of November 2020 when schools went back after the summer holidays and then again after October 2020 half-term. There has been a lower, steadier rate of referrals since Christmas 2020.

Schools referrals were picking up from September to December 2020 and then dropped after Christmas when national lockdown with schools closures. Local Authority and Police were the two biggest referral sources after Christmas.

The **complexity of cases** has been highlighted by the service.

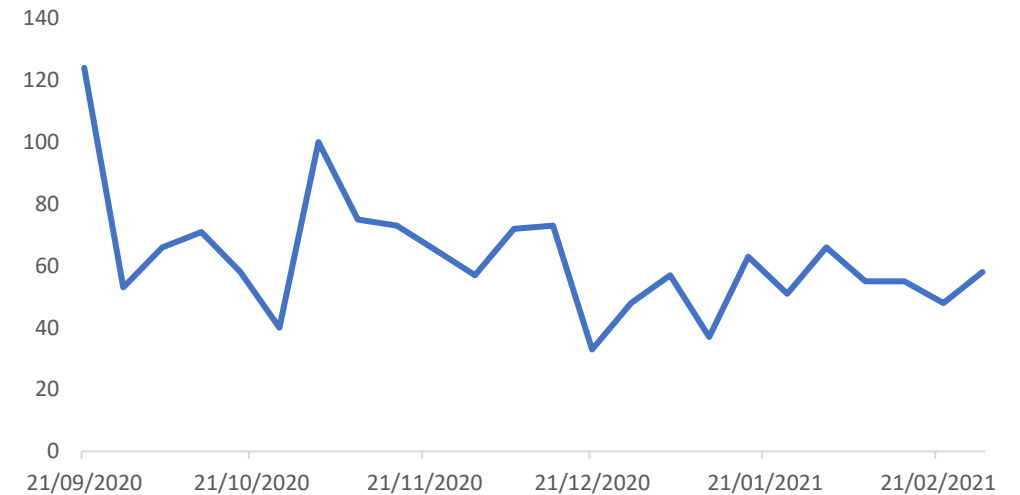
The overall number of open cases has stabilised with around 2,100 cases open to Children's Social Care.

There has been a decrease in S47 investigations which may have been related to Covid 19 but is an assumptive view in the context of the Improvement Plan work to recalibrate the level of work at a statutory level in line with consistent practice and application of threshold. There are still monthly variations.

Children on a child protection plan numbers have decreased month on month. Child Protection cases are still higher than the national average, however are now similar to statistical neighbours.

Although there hasn't been a drop in Children in Care numbers, the numbers have stopped increasing monthly and have now stabilised.

Referrals to Children's Social Care, NELC 2nd Wave



Long Term/ Recovery

As part of the work of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership, further analysis on demand and thresholds is being undertaken. There is a lot of work internally and with partners looking at the front door model and thresholds so variances have to be considered within that context. The Integrated Front Door was re-established in August 2020 with a renewed focus on the Early Help offer. Contacts are triaged to Information, Advice and Guidance, Early Help or to Children's Social Care and we have seen around 20% of contacts triaged to Early Help which has helped appropriately reduce the number of social care referrals. There has been an increase in re-referrals during the last year. Re-referral clinics have been recently established with NELC Partners in Practise.

Children in Social Care, England ¹

- School closures have not only affected children's education, they have also left children more vulnerable and at risk of harm.
- Even before the pandemic, there were an estimated 2.2 million children living in households in England affected by at least one of the 'toxic trio' (parental alcohol/drug abuse, severe mental illness and domestic abuse). It is thought that many of these children were not identified and did not have a social worker.
- Lockdowns have made these children even more invisible to services, with the number of social services referrals dropping in lockdowns. Schools, youth clubs and children's centres have not been able to see most children face-to-face.
- The disruption caused by COVID-19 has been worrying for teenagers ahead of their exams. Before the pandemic it was estimated that 1 in 25 teens were already falling through the gaps in education and social care provision. These young people have experienced setbacks such as being persistently absent from education, being in alternative provision, dropping out of school in Year 11, or going missing from care. Without investment to re-engage with these young people, they are extremely vulnerable to unemployment, failure in education and criminal exploitation.

Children Looked After by the Local Authority (CLA)

Local Picture

- In North East Lincolnshire, all children looked after by the local authority (CLA) were seen via telephone, 'NHS Anywhere' and face to face during the pandemic and all gaps continued to be identified and planned for despite the pandemic whether the CLA live in or out of area including in other countries.
- Risk assessments were carried out for all children, this was done face to face for children under 5, those with an adoption plan, carers, unassisted asylum seekers, where a paediatrician needed to undertake a physical examination, those with complex health needs and when a child chose to be seen face to face.
- Each looked after child continued to have their emotional wellbeing and behaviour measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and this was discussed at the monthly multi-agency SDQ meetings.
- Voice of Child tools were continued after statutory health assessments.
- The 'Voice of the Child' tool found that some children used the opportunity of lockdowns to form trusted relationships and positive attachments. On the other hand some children were worried about their own family and their safety. In some instances it was less stressful for children who found it more helpful doing homework at home and were more relaxed without education stressors.

National Picture¹

- Better multi-agency working has been a positive of the pandemic, especially between education and Local Authorities.
- Pressure on family courts significantly impacted LA's ability to issue care proceedings and to protect children. The backlog of public law cases also made it harder to return children home or move them out of care.
- Some children went missing from placements because they wanted to see more of their family.
- Some children in children's homes experienced improved mental health and reported feeling happier. Some staff used the time to improve their relationships with children and young people. However, some children reported feeling more anxious, felt isolated from friends leading to an increase in alcohol and drug use and self-harm.
- Care leavers rely on good housing and support services to help them develop the skills they need to maintain successful tenancies. When these services had been temporarily unavailable it had a negative impact.
- Many care leavers continued to make progress and live independently and personal advisers made specific efforts to keep in touch and keep good relationships with care leavers who were particularly vulnerable or isolated. For some however, lack of contact from social workers and frequently changing social workers led to them feeling mistrustful and in some cases abandoned.

Children at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation

- Due to the increase in the use of social media there has been an increase, nationally in online criminal and sexual exploitation, some elements of this have been seen in North East Lincolnshire.
- There was a concern around a lack of visibility for children and the use of houses etc as oppose to open community spaces during the initial lockdown, however local services were adapted to mitigate this, through the use of partnership working and detached youth work.
- More recently as restrictions lift and weather improves there has been a return to children been targeted in open community settings, and as such local services supporting children at risk of exploitation regularly review and adapt targeted outreach services and projects.
- Exploitation has continued, however the level of referrals appeared to remain level, with no particular spikes/dips.

Domestic Abuse

- There has been a reduction in number of Police reported incidents however NSPCC has seen a national increase of 32% since the start of lockdown, averaging one call an hour. Since the lockdown 1,500 adults contacted the NSPCC Helpline about the risks to children who are trapped behind closed doors. 58% led to referrals or a referral update to the local authority.
- In some cases, fears about the virus were exploited to withhold access to children, cut off contact to family and friends, and monitor movement under the pretext of keeping them safe from the virus. Those affected said this made it difficult to leave and speak out.
- Nationally, Police recorded crime data show an increase in offences flagged as domestic abuse-related during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, however, there has been a gradual increase in police recorded domestic abuse-related offences over recent years as police have improved their recording of these offences; therefore it cannot be determined whether this increase can be directly attributed to the coronavirus pandemic¹.

Domestic Abuse Incidents in Households with Children, Humberside Police, North East Lincolnshire

Month	2019			2020			% Increase in DA Police incidents with child in household
	DV Police Incidents with child in household	Unique children with incident per month	Children with one or more incidents in month	DV Police Incidents with child in household	Unique children with incident per month	Children with one or more incidents in month	
Jan	210	353	426	157	244	286	-25%
Feb	172	294	349	132	225	262	-23%
Mar	222	352	442	150	271	308	-32%
Apr	195	347	414	162	267	306	-17%
May	245	443	569	160	273	296	-35%
Jun	218	413	503	126	228	251	-42%
Jul	230	391	461	222	383	466	-3%
Aug	231	386	463	233	397	487	1%
Sep	160	284	337	187	336	404	17%
Oct	145	244	290	155	248	297	7%
Nov	179	317	375	178	323	383	-1%
Dec	216	378	435	141	276	287	-35%
Total	2425	2938	5064	2004	2583	4033	-17%

From 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020, there were 2,004 police incidents recorded for domestic violence for households with at least one child, a 17% decrease over the year. The period January to June 2020 saw on average a 30% drop in the number of Police recorded incidents. September 2020 saw a 17% increase with 187 incidents reported by the Police compared with 160 in September 2019.

2,583 children had one or more police incidents in 2020. This is a 12% decrease since 2019 when 2,938 children were in a household with one or more domestic violence incidents recorded by the Police.

836 (32%) of these children had more than one domestic violence incident reported to the Police. 5 children had 10 or more incidents of domestic violence reported to the Police during the year. 64 children had between 5 and 10 incidents and 767 children had between 2 and 4 incidents.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Healthy Birth and the Early Years

Pregnancy

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on those pregnant, giving birth or at home with a baby or toddler. For generations, no other group of parents have had to navigate pregnancy and birth in such extraordinary circumstances.¹

The first years of a child's life from pregnancy to age two lay the foundations to a healthy life, the support and wellbeing of babies in the first years are strongly linked to future outcomes including educational achievement, physical and mental wellbeing.¹

Impact on the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Service

- Contact moved from face to face to telephone, a difficult adjustment for both practitioners and patients. It has been challenging not being able to see women with their babies to assess any attachment difficulties, 'caring over a computer' and the unseen risks and safeguarding issues.
- There has been an **increase in urgent referrals** and an increase in **acuity**, including a **new cohort of women**, not previously known to the service.
- Staff had lack of adhoc peer support which is vital when dealing with a complex case load.
- Despite the difficulties faced, **close relationships have remained** with **maternity and health visiting** services and the team have been able to attend more virtual meetings both regionally and nationally. Additionally, the service has continued to see positive feedback and outcomes for women.
- Moving forward the service will increase face to face contacts and slowly integrate back into the office, review thresholds for assessment will be reviewed and training will be reinstated.

Maternity Voices Survey, Humber Coast and Vale²

- More mothers felt **unhappy** or very unhappy about their **antenatal appointments** than those who felt happy/ very happy about them.
- Although a small number of women liked telephone appointments reporting that they save on travel and were more convenient, an overwhelming number did not like having their appointments over telephone, reporting that they didn't feel they were as thorough as face to face appointments, it was harder to establish a relationship with the midwife and they couldn't get all of the information they needed.
- Face to face appointments facilitate more appropriate conversations, physical checks and offer more reassurance to pregnant women.
- More than 80% of those surveyed would rather see their midwife/ consultant face to face.
- Partners not being able to attend scans/ appointments left mothers feeling **anxious** and **alone**.
- Only being able to have **one birthing partner, not having partners on the ward for early labour/ induction** caused **increased anxiety** for some women. 20% of women had a positive experience and received great care and support.
- Most people did feel well informed about changes and how that might affect their care.

1. Best Beginnings, Home Start, Parent-Infant Foundation. (2020) Babies in Lockdown <https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/news/the-babies-in-lockdown-report>

2. Humber Coast & Vale Maternity Voices Partnership (2020) <https://www.humbercoastandvalematernity.org.uk/support1/maternity-voices-partnership/>

Early Years- Health Visiting

- The Health Visiting service has maintained delivery of the mandated core contacts inline with the NHS community prioritisation model utilising a mix of virtual, telephone and face to face contacts.
- The only contact that saw a reduction due to the service not being able to offer a catch up to these families was the 12 month review. These families were sent a targeted letter and development guide and asked to contact the service should they have any concerns.
- Locally, **breastfeeding** continuation figures have **not seen a decline** during the pandemic.
- First time parents have felt lonely, Health Visitors have contacted parents more often than usual to check in with them.
- Increase in **post-natal depression**, some of which has been referred to specialist services, but low level support has been given by health visitors with regular listening visits. Some of this can be attributed to the pandemic as comments from parents were because they felt stuck in their homes and couldn't see friends.
- Parents with young children feel guilty as they have not had the opportunity to form friendships with other children, the pandemic has restricted the opportunity for **social interaction** and development with peers as they have been with adults all the time and this is all they have known – particularly babies.
- Children who were previously attending early years settings have struggled going back into setting after the lockdown, not wanting to leave their parents (**separation anxiety**). Lots of worries about the impact of children starting school and the lack of socialisation, children have not formed friendships.

Health Indicators	2019-2020				2020-2021		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Number of mothers who received a first face to face antenatal contact with a Health Visitor	170	224	175	178	112	152	173
Percentage of births that receive a face to face NBV within 14 days by a Health Visitor	82.2%	84.8%	88.0%	87.3%	37.0%	88.3%	91%
Percentage of face-to-face NBVs undertaken after 14 days, by a Health Visitor	17.0%	13.7%	11.1%	12.7%	61.3%	9.8%	8.0%
Total coverage of NBVs in Quarter	99.2%	98.5%	99.1%	100 %	98.3%	98.1%	98.7%
Percentage of children who received a 6-8 week review by the time they were 8 weeks.	83.8%	83.7%	89.0%	93.5%	92.7%	90.6%	92.8%
% 12 Month Reviews (Before 12 Months)	86.1%	91.6%	92.6%	87.2%	51.5%	10.2%	90.2%
% children due a review by the end of the quarter, who received a 2-2½ year review, by the age of 2½ year	89.4%	89.4%	89.6%	91.0%	87.1%	87.6%	85.7%
Babies totally or partially breastfed at 10 days	42.3%	37.7%	35.9%	40.4%	42.3%	39.6%	43.9%
Babies totally or partially breastfed at 6-8 weeks	24.1%	27.0%	27.3%	27.0%	29.6%	30.0%	29.7%

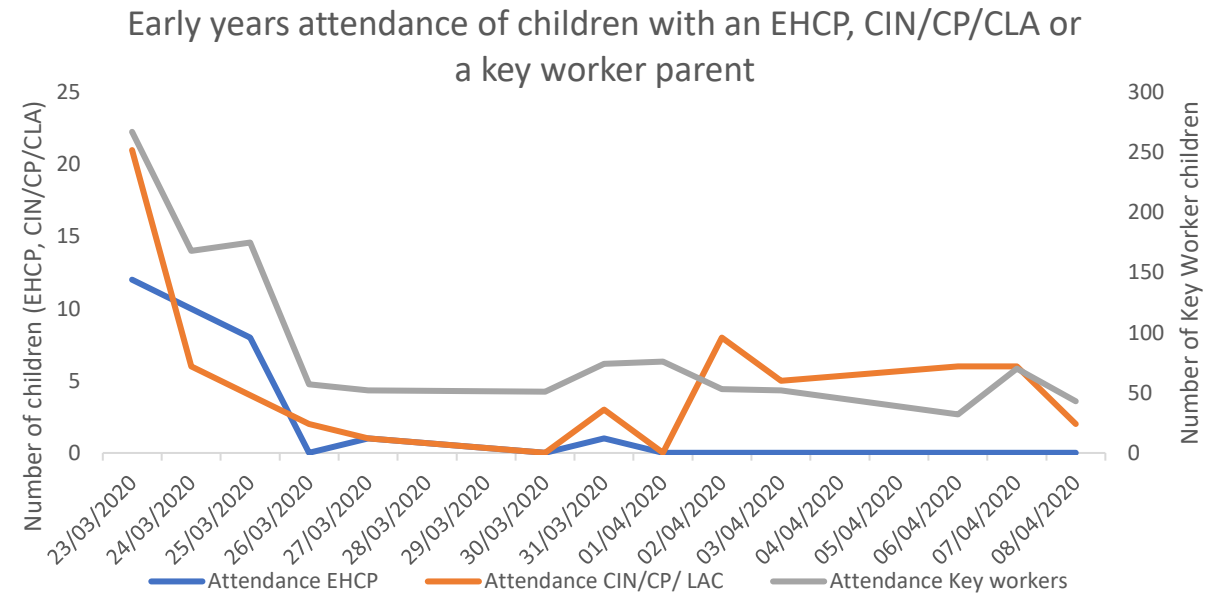
Babies in Lockdown report found¹

- 68% of parents felt the changes brought about by COVID-19 were affecting their unborn baby, baby or young child.
- Babies and young children were not able to develop their **social skills** through attending baby classes or playing with other children.
- Almost half of parents reported their baby being **more clingy** and a quarter said their baby had cried more than usual.
- 61% of parents had concerns about their **own mental health**.
- 87% of parents were more **anxious** as a result of COVID-19. Parents from BAME backgrounds, parents under 25 years and those with a household income less than £16k were more likely to report feeling 'a lot' more anxious.

1. Best Beginnings, Home Start, Parent-Infant Foundation. (2020) Babies in Lockdown <https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/news/the-babies-in-lockdown-report>

Early Years Settings/ Childcare Providers, NEL

- In the 1st lockdown, a significant number of early years settings closed, on 6th April 2020 64 out of 141 (44%) settings were closed. In the most recent lockdown the number who closed was much smaller, 16 out of 137 (12%) providers were closed on 14th Jan 2021.
- By the beginning of April 2020 there were no children with an EHCP attending an early years setting.
- The number of children attending early years/ childcare at the beginning of the pandemic were very low, just 58 children attended on 6th April 2020 compared to 1,952 children at the start of the most recent lockdown 14th Jan 21. Attendance figures have increased week on week since the beginning of Jan 21 (with the exception of half term) with 2,618 attending the week before the easter holidays.
- At the beginning of the pandemic some settings had to consider whether or not it was financially viable to stay open and if they would have to lay off any staff. If too many settings closed this would have an impact on future provision, possibly not being able to meet future demand.
- When childcare settings reopened in June 2020, many families were not able to access the childcare they needed because Government advice at the time was that children must only attend one setting, therefore school children could not attend childcare at another setting.



- In a local survey of early years childcare providers, the main issue for children reported was **separation anxiety**. **Speaking and language**, settling in and following instructions were also reported as issues.
- 34.2% of childminders said that children's communication and language has fallen behind and over half (52.6%) **have fallen behind in their personal, social and emotional** development.
- 41.7% said they had noticed a difference in new cohorts of children compared to pre-covid cohorts, 58.3% hadn't noticed a difference.

Early Years Providers, England– Ofsted’s research findings¹

- Many children have left Early Years settings since the first lockdown and have not returned.
- Even though providers are fully open, fewer children are on roll compared to March 2020.
- Almost all providers said that the pandemic had significantly impacted on the learning and development of children and were particularly concerned about children’s personal, social and emotional development, similar findings were reported in the local survey.
- Most providers were more concerned about the learning and development of children with SEND, those who speak English as an additional language, children living in poverty and those whose parents were not engaging previously.
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds did not always have access to toys at home that they would have in the Early Years setting, some had been unable to play outside and those who speak English as an additional language had not been able to speak and hear English.
- Many providers said that children with SEND had not received the additional support they needed because services had closed or limited face-to-face visits and were concerned about the long term impact of this on children’s development. Delays in accessing speech and language therapy meant that some children’s speech and communication skills were declining.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Starting and Developing Well

Starting and Developing Well

- Many parents are saying that they have struggled with their **child's behaviour**, they are more clingy and have more temper tantrums. Parents have then given in easily and not stuck to routine and boundaries like they usually would – this will impact transition into settings/schools¹.
- There has been an increase in parents saying their child has had more **screen time** than they would usually allow¹.
- A survey of 14-19 year olds found that 40% were **snacking more** since during lockdown. Combined with the loss of PE lessons and **cancelled sports clubs**, it is likely that children's physical fitness has significantly deteriorated during this period².
- Overall, the majority of 10 to 17 year olds said they are **coping well** with the challenges brought about by COVID-19, with the biggest challenge **not being able to see their friends and family**. Most young people were able to cope well with increased handwashing and social distancing and only a small proportion were really concerned about their exams being cancelled, although unsurprisingly this was more of a concern for older pupils³.
- Although there have been many negatives for children and young people, many reported that they feel more grateful for their life and the people around them, additionally many children felt **positive about the extra time they have spent with their families**³.

School Nursing Service, NELC

Increase in GPs referring to the service to undertake hearing tests as they have not been offering face to face contacts – GPs would usually do a physical check of the ears before a hearing test as many unnecessary referrals are made due to build up of ear wax.

There has been limited sexual health support going into schools due to difficulties in providing open access health and wellbeing clinics. However, the service has worked alongside virginicare to provide outreach contraception during lockdown, many pupils continued to access the text service to request this support.

At the beginning of the pandemic the school nursing service saw a decrease in referrals as schools closed and many of the pupils that were being supported continued to have contact via virtual methods. Pupils have engaged well with using digital technology. Lots of updates have gone out via schools to remind pupils about the school nurses text service and the offer during the pandemic. Home visits continued.

Since schools opened there has been an increase in referrals for:

Anxiety (back to school, friendships)

Sleep support (all age groups)

Routine and boundaries (poor behaviour)

Support around diet and weight (fussy eaters)

Toileting (mainly younger children in Reception/Year 1)

1. NELC School Nursing Service

2. Children's Commissioner (2020) Childhood in the time of Covid <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/cco-childhood-in-the-time-of-covid.pdf>

3. The Children's Society (2020) Life on Hold, Children's Wellbeing and COVID-19 <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/life-on-hold>

Starting and Developing Well- Regression

Younger children appear to have struggled during lockdown, with parents of children aged 4–10 years reporting increased **behavioural and attention difficulties**. Many parents are noticing regression in their young children's development during the current COVID crisis¹. Parents describe tantrums, refusal to do schoolwork, toileting accidents, baby talk, intense and unpredictable emotions, hyperactivity, sleep difficulties, and more. Though, regression is a normal part of childhood development, with the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence shows that it is happening in a vast and more widespread way than normal. **Disabled children, like those who have severe autism, are likely to have regressed even more** during this pandemic¹.

School closures, social distancing and the lockdown have seriously affected the ability of services to support children and families There is growing evidence that the past year of lockdowns has had an impact on young children's development especially their **language skills**. Data from 50,000 pupils and a survey of schools across England have shown an increased number of four- and five-year-olds needing help with language. Three-quarters of the primary schools surveyed said that children starting in Reception last September needed more help with language skills than in the previous academic year².

Early language development is a significant health inequalities issue and evidence shows that poor speech development can have long-term effects on learning. The evidence base suggests that early language skills are powerful predictors of later life chances³.

Findings from research carried out for the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) found that during the lock down, parents were particularly worried about how their children will:

- adjust to changes in the school environment (61 per cent)
- maintain focus and concentration on their school work (45 per cent)
- reintegrate with other pupils, teachers and staff at school (42 per cent)
- cope with worries about Covid-19 (41 per cent)⁴.

A separate survey conducted with school staff across primary schools in England on behalf of EIF in 2019 found that social and emotional learning (SEL) was a **priority for schools**. In a survey of over 600 parents conducted by Ipsos MORI for EIF just as schools started to reopen in England, half of parents surveyed were concerned about their **children's mental wellbeing** as they were returning to school or entering reception, including one in six who said they were very concerned. Lower-income parents, in particular, are more likely than better-off parents to be concerned about their children's mental wellbeing as they return to school⁵.

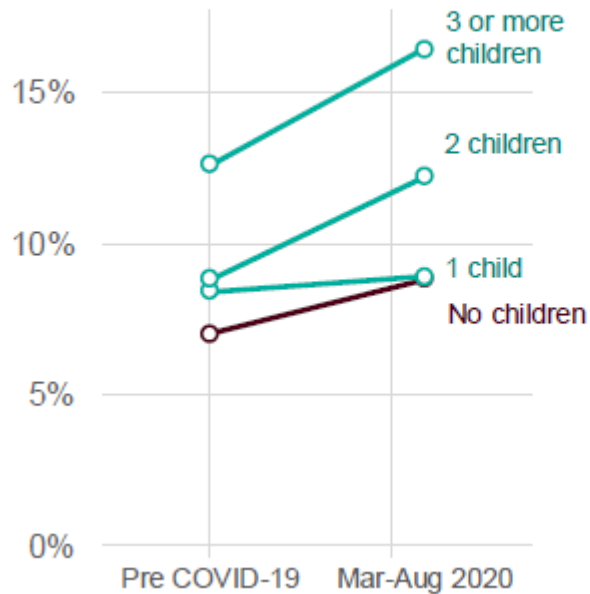
1. University of Oxford (2020) Children how increase in mental health difficulties over COVID-19 lockdown <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-06-16-children-show-increase-mental-health-difficulties-over-covid-19-lockdown>
2. Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) 2020. The impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services Sharing our evidence with parliament [The impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services | Early Intervention Foundation \(eif.org.uk\)](https://www.earlyinterventionfoundation.org.uk/news/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-and-childrens-services)
3. Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) 2021. Lockdowns hurt child speech and language skills
4. Nursery World 2021. Coronavirus: 'Concerning' impact on language development and PSED among four-to five-year-olds <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/coronavirus-concerning-impact-on-language-development-and-psed-among-four-to-five-year-olds>
5. Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) 2020. Parents worry about children's mental health and well-being in return to school <https://www.eif.org.uk/blog/parents-are-concerned-about-the-mental-wellbeing-of-children-returning-to-school-and-they-want-schools-to-help>

Impacts of COVID-19 on Child Poverty

Child Poverty

Food insecurity in households has increased during the pandemic. Households with children were already more likely to experience food insecurity than those without and that gap has widened, those with 3 or more children are the most likely to have experienced food insecurity during the pandemic.¹

Food insecurity in households by number of children % of households experiencing food insecurity



Food banks in North East Lincolnshire.

Over 1,000 families in North East Lincolnshire have relied on food banks during the pandemic.

- Rock – in December were at 900 food parcels per week, slight decline since Christmas 2020 but numbers remain high.
- West Marsh 148 people were supported per week in December 2020.
- We Are One – figures are difficult to verify as they do a range of provision from drop in services to food parcels but they support around 600 people per week.
- Care – supported 56 families throughout December 2020.
- Oasis – support families with Children that attend an Oasis school around 50 families receiving regular support.

Grants

Two grant schemes were set up nationally during the pandemic to provide direct support to individuals and families that suffered hardship as a result of Covid.

The first was the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant funded via Defra which provided food and bill support. The scheme was administered via a number of local Voluntary Sector Organisations who supported people with access to shopping and medications, provided befriending calls to people experiencing social isolation and provided a complex case scheme where people with multiple problems were supported to address the issues they faced.

The second was the Winter Grant scheme funded via the DWP which had to be mainly used on food and warmth. Locally free school meals were provided to eligible children over Christmas, Easter and the half terms and just over 7,000 children benefitted. A number of voluntary sector organisations supported families and individuals and they put in place a utility voucher scheme, provided additional food via food banks, food larders and healthy eating projects, provided new equipment for people without fridges or cookers so that they could store food for longer and cook the food that they could get access to. It also supported homeless people with warm clothing and bedding during the winter months. As well as the families of the 7,000 children the scheme also supported over 300 individuals experiencing difficulty with food and utility costs.

1. Coyle, B. Bamford, C. (2021) One year on – an overview of the wider impacts of COVID-19 on health inequalities in a national and regional context, LKIS, PHE

Impacts of poverty on families in the pandemic¹

- There is no doubt that financial challenges have increased for many children and young people as a direct result of the pandemic. Nationally there were 400,000 additional households with children claiming Universal Credit in May 2020, this included increases in claims from young people aged 16-19. There had also been an increase in families relying on food banks and children living in households where no one is working.
- Those already struggling financially have been disproportionately affected and are more likely to have been more financially impacted by the pandemic.
- Of families with pre-existing financial difficulties 57% reported not being able to afford essential household items and 47% said they were unable to afford food. Additionally, low income families as well as those who have children with SEND reported higher levels of stress and anxiety.
- The education gap is widening between the richest and poorest children. Before the pandemic there was already a gap of 45 minutes learning time between the richest and poorest children and during the first lockdown this increased by a further 15 minutes. The most deprived children reported feeling more academic pressure and lack of support in school.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Young Carers

Young Carers

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new and increased pressures for young carers. Young carers are **doing more without a break**, this means it is harder to stay well, achieve in education and do the things that matter to them. The Carers Trust Survey found that since the beginning of the pandemic;

- 66% of young carers and 74% of young adult carers are feeling **more stressed** and 69% are feeling less connected to others.
- 11% of young carers and 19.7% of young adult carers report an **increase of 30 hours** or more in the amount of time they spend caring per week.
- 67% of young carers and 78% of young adult carers are more **worried about the future**.

Many young carers live in low income households, young adult carers often work to top up household income, for those on furlough the drop in wages has put extra pressure and stress upon them. Caring for people who are shielding, changes to supermarkets and the availability of food and medicines have all had an impact.

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Young Carers in North East Lincolnshire

Some of the young carers have reported feeling more isolated as there has been no respite from home. This has resulted in the need to refer to Young Minds Matter (YMM) or mental health support such as Compass. Locally, there has been an increase in young carers being referred for mental health support.

Some young carers were not offered school places and have missed the contact the Young Carers Service usually provides and despite trying to recommend using the other support options for emotional wellbeing like Kooth etc they have expressed that this is not the same as the support they receive from us in the project face to face. Parents have been in touch asking when their children can access support again as they have noticed the emotional wellbeing of their children being impacted.

This has also impacted on the project staff, who have felt they are letting the young people down when they needed support most, despite videocalls and regular phone calls this is no substitute for face to face contact with these young people.

School is a safe place for young carers and this was often not able to be accessed. This was not always due to the school not offering Young Carers a place but that they were kept at home to continue their caring role for both parents or siblings. However, some schools did not consider Young carers as a vulnerable cohort and declined to offer places to them over lockdown.

The lack of decent internet signals impacted on the ability to access online learning and young carers groups support, leaving them feeling more isolated than before, funding was accessed for iPad and laptops for young carers to access during this time. (Young Carers Service).