



Education and Early Childhood Development & Covid-19



Young children require nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early learning opportunities.

The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have a huge impact on all these five components of nurturing care, especially as families experience massive income and health shocks. Early childhood is a time when the brain is most sensitive to changes, and adversities can have life-long consequences. The most vulnerable children from low-resourced families, children with disabilities, and those living with abuse, neglect, and domestic violence are most likely to fall through the cracks. Post-pandemic recovery must prioritise early childhood development to ensure that our children are able to reach their full potential for a strong and resilient future.

Key challenges



- **Many families worldwide will experience a massive income shock as a result of Covid that will impact on their children's development potential.** Even in an optimistic scenario, 176 million people will be pushed below the US\$3.20 a day poverty line. The regional impact is uneven, with two-thirds of this number expected to be in South Asia ([Mahler et al., 2020](#)).

- **The pandemic will push a large number of children into poverty.** 40 to 60 million more children will fall into extreme poverty and adversities at a young age will have lasting consequences on the rest of their lives ([Mahler et al., 2020](#)).
- **The significant disruption to maternal care, especially in low- and middle-income countries, can lead to significant loss of life.** During the Ebola crisis, the drop in use of reproductive and maternal healthcare services was so large that there were more maternal and neonatal deaths and stillbirths than the number of deaths directly caused by the pandemic ([Sochas et al., 2017](#)).
- **Children worldwide are missing out on critical early education.** Because of the pandemic, at least 40 million children worldwide are now missing out on early childhood education ([Gromada et al., 2020](#)).
- **Early childhood development services will need significantly more support to survive the pandemic.** In the US, half of all childcare services available may disappear without additional financial assistance ([Center for American Progress, 2020](#)).
- **Children in low-income countries, where early childhood development services are often informal, are at particular risk of falling through the cracks.** Only 21% of children in low-income countries were attending preschool prior to the pandemic ([Devercelli, 2020](#)).
- **In a crisis, young children are more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, and stigma.** Evidence from the previous Ebola crisis suggests that young children are more likely to experience violence, abuse and neglect during pandemics as families struggle to cope ([Devercelli, 2020](#)).
- **Covid-19 prevention responses, especially social isolation and quarantine, will make children vulnerable to psychosocial stress.** A recent rapid systematic review points out the moderate to large correlations between social isolation and depressive symptoms. In a study of previous infectious disease in the US, Canada, and Mexico, about 28% of children who experienced isolation/quarantine met the PTSD benchmark, compared with 5.8% of those who did not ([Loades et al., 2020](#); [Sprang & Silman, 2013](#)).
- **Caregivers are experiencing increased stress in the Covid-19 context.** Initial research shows one in four quarantined parents are showing signs of mental ill-health, compared with one in 20 non-quarantined parents ([Gromada et al., 2020](#)).

- **Distance learning can be a struggle for many caregivers.** In Ethiopia, nearly half of caregivers have never been to school, only one third have completed primary school, and half cannot read, which makes home learning extremely difficult for the poorest families.
([Kim & Rose, 2020](#)).
- **Young children are more likely to struggle with distance learning.** In grades K-3, children are still developing the skills to regulate their own behaviour, emotions, and attention, and therefore struggle with distance learning
([National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020](#)).
- **Even prior to the crisis, early childhood education was struggling for visibility on donor agendas.** From 2015 to 2017, aid for pre-primary education declined by 27% and accounted for just 0.5% of total education aid in 2017
([Zubairi & Rose, 2019](#)).
- **Many people will not be able to return to work without childcare options and the childcare burden will without a doubt fall on mothers and female caregivers.** In 2018, 606 million working-age women were unavailable for employment because of their caregiving responsibility, compared with only 41 million men
([Gromada et al., 2020](#)).
- **As childcare services reopen, it is critical to protect the childcare workers on the frontline.** In the US, childcare workers are twice as likely to live in poverty, and only 15% have health insurance from their job compared with 49.9% of other workers
([Gould, 2015](#)).

Make the case



- **Home-based early childhood interventions can be an effective response.** The impact of disruption can be limited by home-based early childhood development programmes such as distribution of books to families, TV programmes and radio learning, which have all been linked to improved developmental outcomes
([Devercelli, 2020](#)).
- **Early learning must be part of the recovery.** Thus far, only nine out of 195 countries have childcare support as part of their pandemic response
([Gromada et al., 2020](#); [Gentilini et al., 2020](#)).

- **Early childhood development is one of the best investments for recovery and future resilience.** Each dollar invested in early childhood education can yield a return as high as US\$17 for the most disadvantaged children ([Theirworld, 2017](#)).

Key infographic



By June 2020, only nine out of 195 countries had childcare support as part of their pandemic response.

Key talking points



- Covid-19 has brought to the forefront the critical role of parenting and the tremendous influence the home environment has on children's lives.
- Children from lower-income families, children with disabilities and those in violent family environments are particularly at risk.
- Prioritising early childhood education as a post-Covid recovery strategy will be essential to ensure children do not fall through the cracks.