

# Covid-19 and the Re-Opening of Schools

by Maria Jantunen, B.A. (Educational Sciences); Co-founder of Responsible Technology Network

## Re-Opening of Schools did not increase the Number of Infections

In this article I seek to analyze news and data regarding the situation of schools, how decisions have been and are made and what the legislators should consider when we approach Autumn and the end of summer holidays. I look at the Finnish situation and try to put it in a larger, European as well as a global context.

Reopening the schools on May 13<sup>th</sup> did not increase the number of new Covid-19 infections in the Finnish capital Helsinki, reported Finnish YLE news on June 4<sup>th</sup> <sup>1</sup> In Finland, schools reopened for a good two weeks before summer holidays which started in the beginning of June. While a handful of infections was reported in total 8 schools in the capital area, practically in all cases the virus had been transmitted by a family member, not a school mate or colleague.

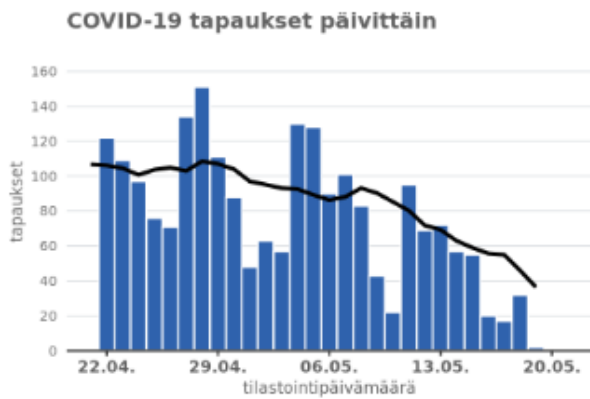
According to YLE news, Helsinki city reported one infection stemming from school environment, and even that one was transmitted in a small group setting *before* the schools were opened – in Finland the children on grades 1-3 whose parents work on a societally critical field such as policemen, kindergarten teachers, nurses and doctors etc. were given contact teaching also during the lockdown. Thus it can well be stated already that the fear among some parents, teachers and experts about the reopening causing an uncontrollable increase in infections, was unfounded.

Thus it was estimated also by the specialist doctor Otto Helve from the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare in the end of May: *children get infected far less frequently than adults and there are hardly any cases in which the infection chain started from a child. So there is little risk that the Covid19 would spread widely in contact teaching.* On May 21<sup>st</sup> the newspaper which interviewed the above mentioned specialist stated that it be impossible yet to estimate whether the school reopening actually increased the number of infections. A head of The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health said it be possible to see the effects later when the summer holidays would have already started. <sup>2</sup>

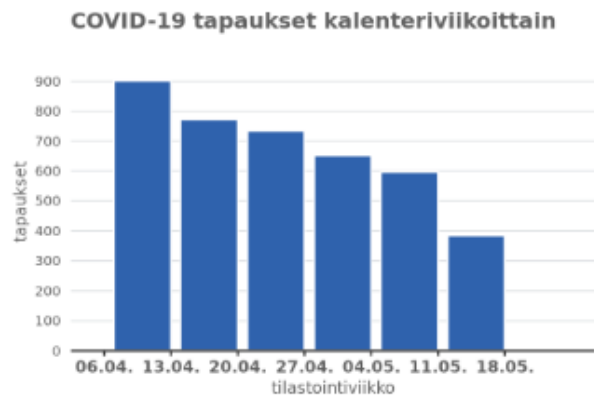
Yet looking at the country's statistics now, mid-June, it seems evident that the situation did not worsen during the second half of May or two weeks after that. Actually quite the opposite – in the statistics

of the Institute of Health and Welfare on May 20<sup>th</sup> one can read the following: ”Compared to the situation of previous two weeks, the Covid19 epidemic has continued slowing down. The average amounts of infections reported weekly to the register of infectious diseases *have been clearly declining for over a month already*” (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

This fact is represented also by these graphics in the same document:

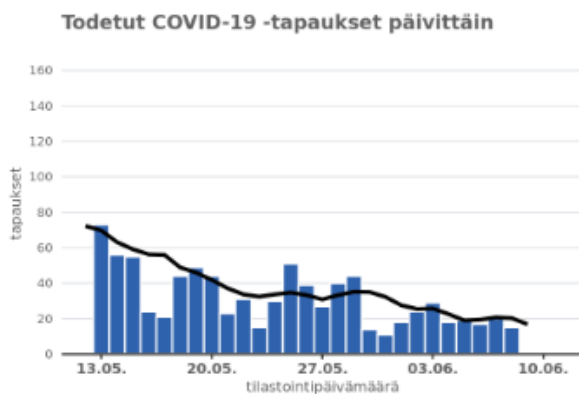


*Cases per day*

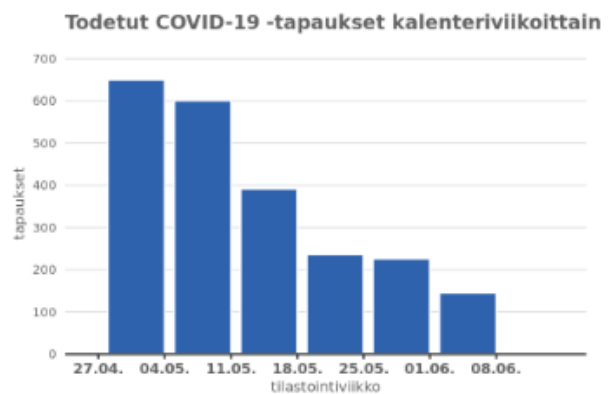


*Cases per week*

Later in June, we can see that the same development continued (see figure below). The corresponding report on June 10<sup>th</sup> noted that the number of hospitalised patients had ”decreased remarkably compared to the one two weeks earlier” The weekly report presented a prognosis that amounts of patients in hospital and in intensive care would decrease further in the coming week.<sup>4</sup>



*Cases per day*



*Cases per week*

If we take a quick look at the other Nordic countries, Denmark reported similar observations as Finland already at the end of May: no negative effect on the Covid19-statistics followed from the

reopening of its schools.<sup>5</sup> Sweden, as we know, never closed its schools in the first place, and neither did Iceland, being a country in which the virus had stopped spreading as early as in the beginning of May<sup>6</sup>. Norway, which we'll discuss a little more in detail, looked back after reopening and acknowledged that it would probably been safe to keep the schools open all the way.<sup>7</sup>

Director of the Norwegian public health agency, Camilla Stoltenberg, has stated that based on data, there never was a real need to close the schools down and that the "infection was on its way down" already when "the most comprehensive measures were implemented". So, the conclusion can be drawn that the hypothesis of the graphs by the Imperial College London, based on which many countries ordered lockdowns in the first place, proved not to be accurate.<sup>8</sup>

According to Norwegian Camilla Stoltenberg these facts should not be overlooked later "if the infection levels rise again – or a second wave hits in the winter". Norway's Statistics Agency also calculated the long term costs of school lockdowns for children and found that "--every week of classroom education denied to students (--) stymies life chances and permanently lowers earnings potential."<sup>9</sup>

## **No Accurate Scientific Evidence to justify Strict Lockdowns**

As we have already learned from scientists, researching journalists, and even some policy makers, strict lockdowns have not played a significant part in dealing with the covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, several experts would not even call Covid19 a pandemic at all<sup>10</sup>. Sucharit Bhakdi, Renowned microbiology specialist, is one of them and has criticised the German policy in the current situation: [The government's anti-COVID19 measures] are grotesque, absurd and very dangerous [...] The life expectancy of millions is being shortened. The horrifying impact on the world economy threatens the existence of countless people. The consequences on medical care are profound. Already services to patients in need are reduced, operations cancelled, practices empty, hospital personnel dwindling. All this will impact profoundly on our whole society. All these measures are leading to self-destruction and collective suicide based on nothing but a spook."<sup>11</sup>

Kevin Galalae has underlined some basic numbers in the statistics: the Covid19 appears to cause only 0,1% of the infections and 4,6% of the deaths which the common flu causes. Hence he calls it a rather harmless virus. He also points out that "according to the latest European monitoring report, overall mortality in all countries (including Italy) and in all age groups remains within or even below the

normal range so far.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Increasing Inequality**

Let us now move on from analyzing decisions that have been made in different countries and their scientific background and look into the actual effects that closing of schools has had and can have on children and their development.

School closure raised many perplexing issues in the Finnish context. Equality expert Aslak Rantakokko from the Finnish Parents' Association stated that there have been "significant differences between municipalities, schools and even teachers and classes" in the corona time teaching. It is already clear that distance learning has increased inequality. Some families have done well in the circumstances but the overall work load has for many been almost unbearable, that is, because many parents have been working from home while taking care of their small children and also having been mainly responsible for the older children's school work. This applies also for parents who have children with special needs.<sup>13</sup>

According to the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, there are at least 4000 upper grades (classes 7-9) pupils in Finland who already before Corona time were so much absent from school that measures had been taken by the authorities to intervene. It is likely that some of these children belong to the group which the teachers now during school lockdown did not succeed to contact at all. Three experienced special education teachers interviewed in the article tell about going to nearby parks and homes looking for them, some calling several times per day trying to contact the pupils and their parents. One of them describes how it is to hope every summer that these children make it to autumn so they might meet again when the school starts. This time even more so.<sup>14</sup>

Complementing the picture of inequality, many single parents have struggled to combine work and distance learning of children.<sup>15</sup> According to statistics of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, since February 2020 around 120 000 people in Finland are suspended full-time and 60 000 have lost their jobs.<sup>16</sup>

Looking at children's situation locally and globally we cannot ignore the severe threats, either, which they are more exposed to when the everyday refuge of school is not available for. Several actors report an increasing and even exponentially growing risk for violence and abuse<sup>171819</sup>. Extreme poverty, which according to the prognosis of World Bank threatens 60 million is bound to affect millions of

children worldwide.<sup>20</sup>

## **Moving On**

What can we do, then, to ease the situation of parents struggling to support their families and that of children who deserve to have their basic needs met and their rights acknowledged and actualized? We can at least start by taking into account all new scientific evidence that exists now and wasn't there yet in March when legislators needed to make decisions based on a very limited knowledge. We do know that children are hardly infected and also don't transmit the Covid19 virus. Thus keeping schools closed or closing them again in the Autumn is without justification from the viewpoint of science.

What children do need, and in a time like this of globally spread uncertainty even more so, are stable relationships with trustworthy adults and teachers. It is important for them to experience their caretakers to not be overcome by fear and anxiety but, despite all, having a trust in life.<sup>21</sup>

We also need to remember that children learn from hands-on experiences, with their whole body. It cannot be emphasized too much how important movement is for the development of the nervous system. I underline this because if children are learning mostly via computers at home, these are aspects which are likely to cause worry.

Professor, doctor Gertraud Teuchert-Noodt has explained this in the following way. "Brain research shows: The richer a child's former years are filled with physical activities, the better it affects the maturation of mental functions. Children are dependent on a variety of physical movements to anchor real experiences in space and time in their brains. Running, climbing, tumbling, balancing are therefore the initial stimulants. Without them, interconnections in the motor and the downstream brain regions cannot develop normally."<sup>22</sup>

Sedentary lifestyle in general is widely known in research to have the most adverse of effects on the health of children, grown-ups and elderly. Galalae, in fact, emphasizes this when discussing the effects of Covid19 quarantine especially on older people<sup>23</sup>. Hills, King and Armstrong, for their part, state: "Whether a child or adolescent, the evidence is conclusive that physical activity is conducive to a healthy lifestyle and prevention of disease. Habitual physical activity established during the early years may provide the greatest likelihood of impact on mortality and longevity."<sup>24</sup>

Growing concern of the adverse effects of excessive screen time and information technology use in children is one central aspect to take into account when discussing digital or online teaching.<sup>25</sup> Gadi Lissak has listed several such effects like poor sleep and risk factors for cardiovascular diseases such as high blood pressure, obesity and poor stress regulation.<sup>26</sup>

Psychological effects include depressive symptoms, suicidal behavior, ADHD-related behavior, decreased social coping, craving behavior similar to substance dependence etc. "Brain structural changes related to cognitive control and emotional regulation are associated with digital media addictive behavior."<sup>27</sup>:

To sum it up, excessive amount of screen time which digital teaching increases, is problematic for children's development in more ways than one. Real communication and physical participation are vital and cannot be replaced by digital devices. In order to reach an optimal level of maturity of physical, cognitive and socio-emotional capacities all children need "an ongoing human focus".<sup>28</sup>

Legislators should not link decisions of school opening or closing with the idea of a possible Covid19 vaccine. According to a statement by several European doctors the effectivity of a possible vaccine is "highly unsure and perhaps only of a very short term, since this kind of viruses are constantly mutating". They emphasize that a vaccine "does not promote health, but at its best only prevents getting ill of a specific pathogen" and that in this case the reliability of the vaccine is especially low because of its extremely short development process.<sup>29</sup>

These facts have been thoroughly investigated and explained by Nicanor Perlas in his article series Vaccines: Salvation or Damnation<sup>30</sup>. He has proven that in many incidents historically and recently vaccines have done more harm than good to humans. A vaccine might have given the vaccinated the very disease which it was supposed to protect them against, or yet another. The whole development process of a vaccine can be permeated with fraudulent research and other immoralities.

Thus it cannot be justified to link educational decisions with vaccine development process. Science and practical experience in several countries now show clearly now that children are safe at school and indeed sometimes safer than anywhere else. It is children's right to go to school, grow healthy and safe, with the best efforts of us adults supporting them constantly.

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- <sup>2</sup><https://www.kaleva.fi/thl-seuraa-tarkasti-koulujen-oppilaiden-ja-henkilo/2545548>
- <sup>3</sup><https://thl.fi/documents/533963/5860112/Hybridistrategian+seuranta+%E2%80%93+tilannearvioraportti+20.5.2020+.pdf/a645c050-f892-7b71-1c3d-cd854ff9e774?t=1589985058709>
- <sup>4</sup><https://thl.fi/documents/533963/5860112/COVID-19-epidemia+Hybridistrategian+seuranta+%E2%80%93+tilannearvioraportti+10.6.2020+.pdf/3934144e-130c-8c56-a8e1-143cb1d3d35d?t=1591857954228>
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- <sup>6</sup><https://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000006500226.html>
- <sup>7</sup><https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/norway-health-chief-lockdown-was-not-needed-to-tame-covid>
- <sup>8</sup>op.cit.
- <sup>9</sup>op.cit.
- <sup>10</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_is\\_false?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence_the_COVID-19_pandemic_is_false?auto=download)
- <sup>11</sup><https://off-guardian.org/2020/03/24/12-experts-questioning-the-coronavirus-panic/>
- <sup>12</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_is\\_false?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence_the_COVID-19_pandemic_is_false?auto=download)
- <sup>13</sup><https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11368303>
- <sup>14</sup><https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000006523682.html>
- <sup>15</sup><https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11394459>
- <sup>16</sup><https://tem.fi/koronaviruksen-vaikutukset-tyollisyystilanteeseen>
- <sup>17</sup>[https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf](https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup><https://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000006533786.html>
- <sup>19</sup><https://solidaarisuus.fi/heikoimmassa-asemassa-olevien-ihmisten-auttaminen-on-entista-tarkeampaa-koronakriisinkeskella/>
- <sup>20</sup><https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/21/news/national/pandemic-could-push-60m-into-extreme-poverty/726137/>
- <sup>21</sup>[https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf](https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup>[https://eliant.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Conference2017/Thesenpapier\\_2017\\_Teuchert-Nood.pdf](https://eliant.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Conference2017/Thesenpapier_2017_Teuchert-Nood.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic\\_is\\_false?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/42632665/Evidence_the_COVID-19_pandemic_is_false?auto=download)
- <sup>24</sup><https://link.springer.com/article/10.2165/00007256-200737060-00006>
- <sup>25</sup><https://humanetech.com/>
- <sup>26</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S001393511830015X>
- <sup>27</sup>op.cit.
- <sup>28</sup>[https://eliant.eu/download/June\\_2019\\_ENG\\_Long.pdf](https://eliant.eu/download/June_2019_ENG_Long.pdf)
- <sup>29</sup>[https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf](https://medsektion-goetheanum.org/fileadmin/user_upload/StellungnahmeKinderundCorona-5.5.20.pdf)
- <sup>30</sup><http://covidcalltohumanity.org/category/blog/vaccines-salvation-or-damnation/>