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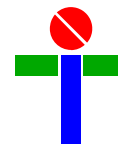
Lockdowns leave half of teenagers battling anxiety and trauma

Royal College of Psychiatrists warns that Covid pandemic has created a mental health crisis among children

By Laura Donnelly, HEALTH EDITOR *and* Rosie Taylor

29 June 2021 • 9:00pm





Campaign for Children

Half of teenagers have been left suffering anxiety and trauma in the wake of the Covid lockdowns, a major review has found.

A systematic review into [the impact of school closures](#) includes UK data on more than 2,000 young people questioned in depth about their feelings and experiences.

The research shows that 53 per cent of girls and 44 per cent of boys aged 13 to 18 were found to be suffering from trauma or PTSD in the months after [the first lockdown](#). Sixty per cent of boys and 50 per cent of girls of the same age were classed as suffering from anxiety.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists said the Covid pandemic had caused [a mental health crisis among children](#), with school closures having had a "devastating" impact. Psychologists said they had seen a 50 per cent rise in children and teenagers showing signs of agoraphobia following repeated lockdowns.

It comes as The Telegraph [campaigns to put children first](#), calling on ministers to prioritise the needs of the generation growing up in the shadow of Covid as the country recovers from its repeated lockdowns.

Pressure mounts to scrap bubbles

Telegraph View: Time to end this mad Covid school regime	Revealed: Boris Johnson's five-point plan to end schools chaos
Archbishop of York calls for end to school bubbles disruption	Face masks may still be needed in classrooms, says teaching union

On Tuesday, the children's commissioner for England said closing schools had been a "horrific" step to take, adding that her forthcoming census of more than 550,000 children will show [mental health](#) is the most pressing concern.

The systematic review, led by Prof Russell Viner, of University College London, examined 72 studies on the impact of school closures on [the mental and physical health of children](#).

The findings, set to be published next month, include international data which suggests a two-month school closure could be enough to fuel [childhood obesity](#) by as much as 11 per cent in the subsequent year.

Experts warned that rising numbers of children and teenagers are showing signs of [agoraphobia following repeated lockdowns](#). Psychologists have reported a 50 per cent increase in the number of young people they are seeing who are afraid to go out of the house or even leave their bedrooms, and are shunning social interaction with others.

Maryhan Baker, a child psychologist, said she expected to see a "huge spike" in children displaying agoraphobic behaviours as restrictions eased in the coming months, particularly when schools fully reopen for the new term in September.

She said the problems were caused by children feeling "overwhelmed" at the thought of leaving the "safe space" of their homes and having to go back into situations such as school where they felt they had no control.

"It's 100 per cent linked to lockdown because that facilitated avoidance of these situations, but now we're asking children to go back and that's caused a whole host of issues," she said.

Senior NHS executives have described seeing agoraphobic behaviour in their own children.

Dr Elaine Lockhart, the chairman of the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said "urgent action" was needed to expand the workforce, with more psychiatrists and other clinical workers needed to cope with demand.

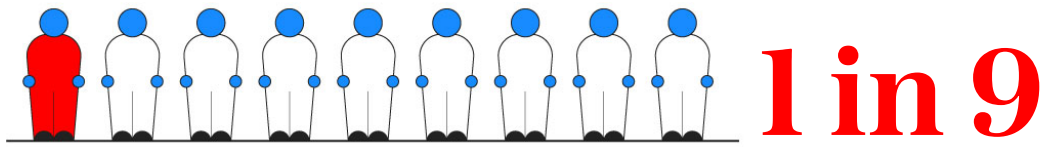
She said: "Our children and young people are facing a mental health crisis caused by the pandemic. As a psychiatrist, I've seen the devastating effect that [school closures](#), disrupted social lives and uncertainty about the future have had on the mental health of our children and young people."

While NHS plans to boost mental health support have been accelerated, the targets for 2023 would still leave two-thirds of children without help, she added.

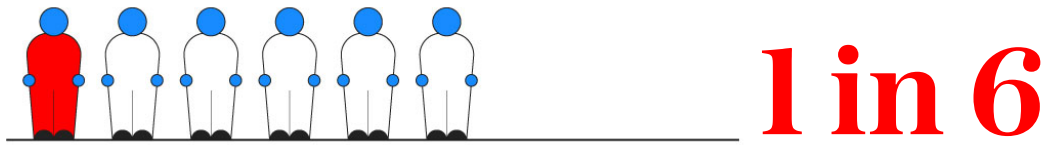
Rise in mental health referrals

Proportion of children experiencing a probable mental disorder

2017

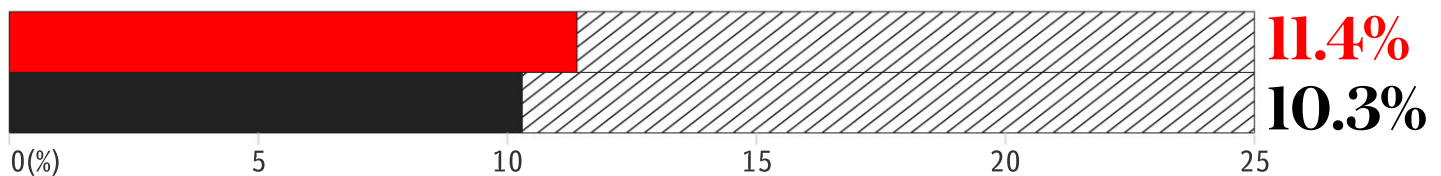


2020 (July)

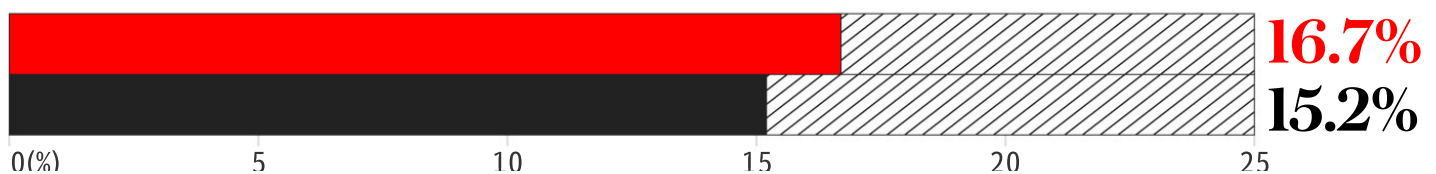


In children aged 5 to 16 ■ Boys ■ Girls

2017



2020 (July)



One in many young people have experienced mental distress for the first time during the pandemic, according to the mental health charity Mind. Its research found that more than half of young people and adults said they were worried about being near others once lockdown restrictions are fully relaxed.

Alison McClymont, a child psychotherapist and psychologist, said she was supporting teenagers who now only wanted to attend school online because there was less pressure to socialise.

"I am seeing many more referrals from parents who are concerned how socially isolated their teen has become," she said. "This is worrying, given that it may signify a rise in agoraphobic behaviours in this age group... it wouldn't surprise me if we see this trend [grow] over the next two years."

The psychologist Helen Spiers, of Mable Therapy, an online counselling service for young people, said children's social anxiety, health anxiety or depression caused by lockdown could manifest as a fear of leaving the house or going to school.

Her service has seen increased demand from parents and schools since lockdown lifted, with some parents saying their children would not leave their bedrooms and that online counselling was the only way they could get help.

"Just the idea of sitting in a busy classroom again is really terrifying for a lot of children," she said. "We are seeing an awful lot of social anxiety about going out, seeing other people, having to be in groups, mixing with peers, having to build friendships again and talking in front of others."

Ms Spiers said children had taken on the message that there was "a killer virus out there" and that if they failed to obey social distancing rules they could inadvertently kill their elderly relatives.

"Children take things very literally and struggle to assess risk, so this is black and white for them," she said. "They have got the message that the outside world is a dangerous place. Now it's hard for us to reverse that."

Depression and low mood caused by the boredom, isolation and lack of structure during lockdown was also contributing to young people not wanting to leave the house. "For some children, it feels much easier to stay in bed and play on the X Box and not have to face the world," Ms Spiers added.

Deirdre Kehoe, of the mental health charity YoungMinds, said: "Many young people will need an adjustment period to get back into the swing of their lives before coronavirus, especially if they've been isolating and staying within their close families for long periods of time. The prospect of leaving home and resuming daily activities may be overwhelming and upsetting."

She said families needed to give children "time and space to adapt" and work up slowly to bigger events such as visiting the playground or having larger gatherings.

Claire Murdoch, NHS England's director for mental health said: "The pandemic has turned young people's lives upside down, and in the year to March 2021 the NHS has stepped up to support them, treating more young people than ever before, working with schools and other

local agencies to ensure early intervention and support, including through 183 mental health support teams working with schools across the country.

"Under the NHS Long-Term Plan, an additional 345,000 children and young people every year will receive help with their mental health and wellbeing, and so if you are struggling or have a child who needs help, please continue to come forward and get the care you or they need."

How has your child been affected by lockdown? Let us know below