

## U.N. urges action to mitigate risks of pandemic on children's rights, safety, development

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**Editor's note:** For the latest news on coronavirus disease 2019, visit

<https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

Children are not the face of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, but they risk being among its biggest victims, according to a [policy brief](#) from the United Nations (U.N.).

“This is an unprecedented crisis and it presents unprecedented risks to the rights and safety and development of the world's children. Those risks can only be mitigated through unprecedented international solidarity for children and humanity,” according to *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children*, which calls for immediate and sustained actions by governments and policymakers.

Many of the actions parallel the AAP's mission and vision for children, including policies on equity, poverty and support of global maternal, newborn and child health programs.

Numerous global childhood programs have ground to a halt during the pandemic. Lockdowns and shelter-in-place measures are likely to put vaccine-preventable infectious diseases like polio and measles back on the map. Suspended maternal, newborn and child health interventions will reverse the past two to three years of progress in reducing infant mortality, according to the report.

Lack of essential services like school meals and health care may lead to hundreds of thousands of additional child deaths in 2020.

The U.N. brief outlines three main channels through which children are affected by the pandemic: infection with the virus, immediate socioeconomic impacts of measures to stop transmission and end the pandemic, and potential longer-term effects.

Those most at risk are children living in low-income countries, slums, refugee camps and other informal settlements; those near poverty; and those living in extreme poverty. Many of these children also endure violence and abuse during the lockdown, particularly as they shelter in place away from community safety nets such as schools and caregivers.

Children without access to distance learning in the wake of school closures are at risk of dropping out of school, which can incentivize them to join armed groups and put them at risk of human trafficking and adolescent pregnancy.

The policy brief urges governments and policymakers to act on these pressing issues by:

- Rebalancing the combination of interventions to minimize the impact of standard physical distancing and lockdown strategies on children in low-income countries and communities, and expanding social protection programs to reach the most vulnerable children.
- Prioritizing the continuity of child-centered services, with particular focus on equity of access.
- Providing practical support to parents and caregivers on talking with children about the pandemic, managing their own mental health and their children's, and supporting their learning.

The U.N. calls the crisis a “clarion call” for the world’s children and their future. “But we have to act now, we have to act decisively and at very large scale.”

### **Resources**

- [AAP policy “The Role of Pediatricians in Global Health”](#)
- [COVID-19 Updates for Pediatricians](#)

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