

# Covid-19 and Children's Play

## July 2021 statement

### Purpose of this statement

This statement outlines key facts about Covid-19 and children's play, and argues for a balanced approach to decision-making. It builds on previous statements from the Play Safety Forum (PSF). See below for links to this work, which includes references and background information on PSF.

### Key facts

The key facts about Covid-19 and children have been clear from early in the pandemic. Children – especially young children – are **much less badly affected** by the virus than adults, are **less likely than adults to become infected**, and **less likely than adults to transmit the disease to others**. Crucially, for people of all ages, the principle form of transmission is via airborne routes. Hence **the risk of transmission is greatly reduced in outdoor settings**, especially where people are moving around. There is a **very low risk of transmission via surfaces** (fomites).

There is clear evidence that children are **being adversely affected by infection control measures, including measures to restrict their outdoor play opportunities**. Such measures **disproportionately affect children from poorer and marginalised families and communities**, in part because they have worse access to private outdoor space.

Some new variants are more transmissible, and vaccination and other factors have led to different patterns of infection. But this does not alter the above facts (see Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health summary <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-research-evidence-summaries>).

### Conclusions

Even with the emergence of new and more transmissible variants, children remain at very low risk of severe disease, and present a lower risk of transmission than adults. However, the variants are more transmissible by all groups including children, adding to the importance of maximising time in settings which are lowest risk for transmission to occur, such as outdoors.

Good risk-based decision-making always involves recognising the complexity of the task and the potential for unintended consequences. As with medicines, it is crucial to take explicit account of side-effects: in this context, the impact of changes in access to public services and facilities.

Risk benefit approaches are designed to support balanced, thoughtful decision-making, and should be promoted in government guidance. Rather than taking a narrow, exclusive focus on infection control, guidance should explicitly highlight the benefits of outdoor play, and ensure that decision-makers take into account these benefits, and the potential side-effects of control measures. Experience and evidence so far show that in general, keeping children's play facilities open is a proportionate and reasonable response.

### Previous work by PSF

PSF has issued two previous statements on this topic, dated 17 June 2020 and 2 September 2020. These give more details on the research evidence that also supports this latest statement.

Both can be found on the PSF website here (with links to further information about the PSF): <https://playsafetyforum.wordpress.com/covid-19-and-childrens-play/>

**Tim Gill, Chair, on behalf of Play Safety Forum, 12 July 2021.**