

Averting a lost COVID generation

A six-point plan to respond,
recover and reimagine
a post-pandemic world
for every child



WORLD
CHILDREN'S
DAY 20 NOVEMBER





“This is the first truly global crisis most of us have seen in our lifetimes and it will not be the last. No matter where we live, the pandemic affects all of us and children have never been at so much risk. But worse is to come as the global economic crisis unfolds. As the world deals with the economic fallout from the pandemic and its effect on government and household budgets and the private sector, the risks to children are increasing, not decreasing. We must protect the decades of past investment in children.

This is not about a return to the way things were. Children will never accept a return to ‘normal’ after the pandemic because ‘normal’ was never good enough. Our post-pandemic rebuilding must meet the scale of this moment by overcoming our differences – and working across generations – to rebuild a world we want our children to grow up in. World Children’s Day must be a day to reimagine a better future, for every child.”

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore

This brief was produced by the Division of Communication’s Global Content Strategy section with the generous collaboration, input and support of UNICEF colleagues in Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring; Office of Research – Innocenti; Programme Division; and the Office of Global Insight and Policy.

Published by UNICEF
Division of Communication
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
© United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), November 2020

ISBN: 978-92-806-5189-8

Cover photograph: © UNICEF/UN0348832/Panjwani

Averting a lost COVID generation

A six-point plan to respond, recover and
reimagine a post-pandemic world for every child

WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY 2020 DATA AND ADVOCACY BRIEF

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. COVID-19's health impacts on children and young people	4
3. The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on children	6
4. A six-point plan to protect our children	16
 Data annex	 18
Endnotes.....	18

STUDENTS at Preah Norodom Primary School, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, during their second day of school reopening. All the students, teachers and the school director wear masks inside the school compound, maintain physical distancing, follow other best practices and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to stay safe from COVID-19.



1. Introduction

After almost one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began, killing over 1 million people and putting futures into doubt, the impact of the virus on the world's children and young people is becoming clearer – and increasingly alarming. Children face a trifecta of threats: direct consequences of the disease itself, interruption in essential services and increasing poverty and inequality.

Despite being less affected than any other age group, emerging data suggest that children and young people's health may be more directly impacted by COVID-19 than originally anticipated when the crisis began in late 2019. New UNICEF analysis from 87 countries with age disaggregated data shows that as of November 2020, children and adolescents account for 11 per cent of reported COVID-19 infections in those countries.¹ Disruptions to essential services such as education, health care, nutrition and child protection interventions are harming children. A severe global economic recession is impoverishing children and compounding deep pre-existing inequalities and exclusion, as the most disadvantaged households struggle to cope with the damaging fallout from the loss of jobs, livelihoods, incomes, mobility, learning, health and access to services.

The impact of the pandemic will affect children's lives for years to come, even if a breakthrough vaccine becomes available soon. How the world responds now to the myriad risks that the pandemic poses to children and adolescents will determine their future. Unless the global community urgently changes priorities, the potential of this generation of young people may well be lost.

This World Children's Day, UNICEF is taking stock of the global impact of COVID-19 on children and young people, laying out what we know from the latest available data and research, highlighting what is still unclear as well as the options for action, and urging the world to take bold and unprecedented steps to reimagine a better future for children.

COVID-19 is a children's crisis. In the early months of the pandemic, children constituted a low proportion of the population infected. However, as the virus has spread, the number of children and young people who become infected and develop COVID-19 is also increasing and requires specific actions.

While our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on children through science, data and research is evolving rapidly, we have more insight as the pandemic approaches its first anniversary:

- **Children and young people are susceptible to infection from COVID-19.** Even if the pandemic is not predominantly affecting children, the number of children infected is increasing in many countries. While they tend to have milder symptoms compared to adults, severe cases and death do happen, especially among children with co-morbidities.
- **While not the main driver of community transmission, children can transmit the virus to each other and older age groups.** Older children and adolescents need to practice the same behaviors such as social distancing and mask wearing as other members of the population.