

Young people's Q&A 30 July 2020

An online event run by Young Healthwatch Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Police Cadets, Kooth and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust where young people could put their questions about coronavirus to a panel of experts. Here's a summary of the questions that were asked:

The Panel:

- **Dr Katie Malbon**, Paediatric consultant at St Mary's Hospital and lead for adolescent medicine at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
- **Dr Serena Braccio**, registrar in Paediatric Allergy at St Mary's Hospital
- **Ashani Hailstones-Lee**, Integration and Participation Worker with [Kooth](#)

Host: Kiera, Deputy Head Volunteer Police Cadet for Hammersmith and Fulham

Co-hosts: Ciaran from Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Police Cadet and Arthur and Rupert, volunteers with Young Healthwatch Westminster

Q: Is heart surgery safe during COVID?

A (Katie): Yes, heart surgery is safe. Hospitals have created different pathways for patients who need planned tests or operations, to keep them apart from patients coming in for emergencies or with COVID symptoms.

There are safety procedures to make sure that hospitals aren't dangerous places to be. We are doing COVID swabs, PPE is used and enough time is given before any surgery to ensure there are no issues - it's all thought through.

Q: Will face masks be used in schools in September without social distancing?

A (Serena): The advice in classrooms is changing all the time. Before you go back to school in September check with your school what the latest updates are. At the moment young children are considered low risk. Very young children are not required to wear face masks on public transport and shops but it's different for older children and teenagers.

Q: How are people with diabetes affected by the virus?

A (Katie): Anyone with diabetes had been asked to shield until August. They are not more likely to catch the virus but if someone with diabetes does catch it, they are likely to have more severe symptoms.

Q: Does smoking or vaping make COVID worse?

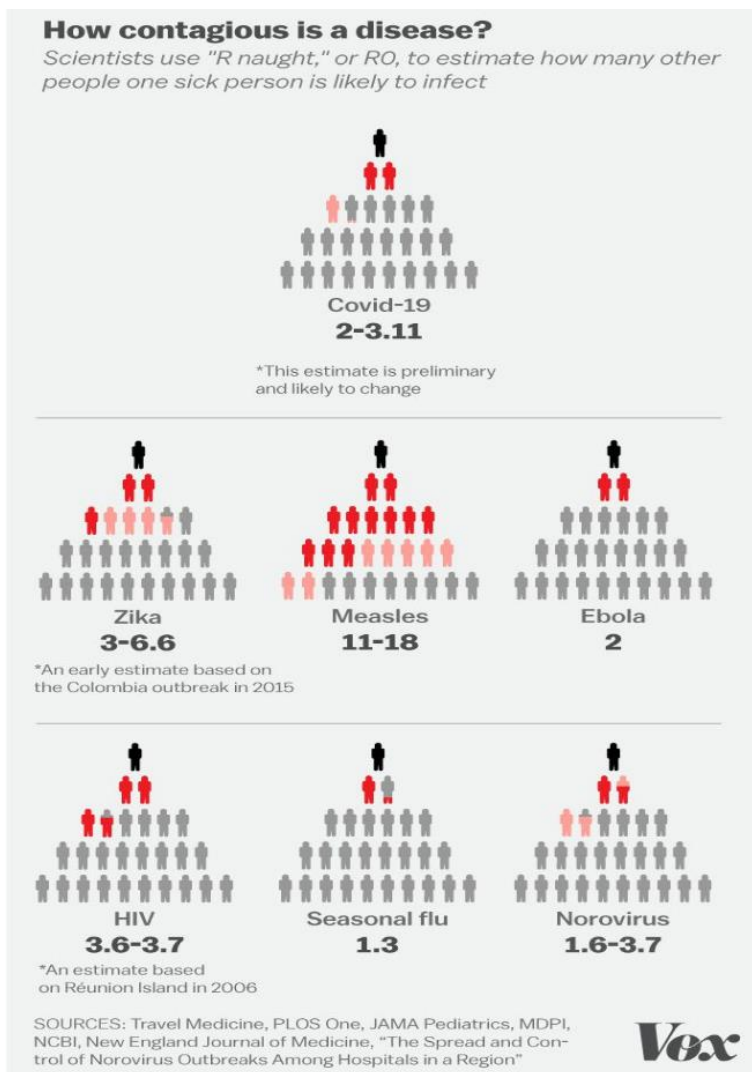
A (Katie): There's no real data yet on the difference smoking makes, but COVID-19 is respiratory illness so it's likely that a smoker would have a more serious reaction to the virus.

Q: How likely is a second wave?

A (Serena): Very likely, but we don't know when we a second wave might be or how serious it will be. As a hospital we are preparing for a second wave in Autumn/Winter, when flu season has started and it's harder for people to be outside.

Q: Is it like a cold/flu?

A: Coronavirus, the common cold and influenza are all respiratory viruses but they all behave in different ways. COVID19 is caused by a specific cold virus (coronavirus) but unlike the common cold its symptoms can be much more severe.



Q: Do you recommend getting a flu jab?

A: Yes, it more important than ever. Whilst there's not a vaccine for COVID it's important to protect yourself from the other risk this winter.

Q: What's happening with the vaccine?

A: We know that some studies have got to phase 2 which is really promising but we don't know when a vaccine will be ready.

Q: If you have had the virus are you now immune or can you catch it again?

A: We are still not sure about the immunity from a previous infection. For now, even if

you've had the virus you should still follow the same advice about social distancing and washing your hands.

Q: How is the 'r' rate calculated?

A (Serena): The r number or r0 number is the number of people someone with the virus might infect.

Before lockdown the r number was between 2-3.1 now it's down to between 0.7 and 0.9. Statisticians and experts in public health have created a formula to calculate the r value, but unfortunately I don't know how it's calculated.

A (Arthur from Healthwatch): equation: $r0 = \text{transmissibility} * \text{probability of infection between susceptible and infected individual} * \text{average rate of contact} * \text{duration of infection}$

Q: Does viral load correlate with someone being infectious?

A (Serena): It's too early to know but you may have seen in the news that the isolation period has gone up to 10 days instead of 7 for anyone who has coronavirus symptoms.

Q: Can school shirts and ties potentially carry and spread the virus?

A (Serena): What we know is that the virus spreads through the nose and eyes and it is unlikely to live on ties and shirts. Schools are taking different approaches about uniform so check what your school are doing.

Q (Keira): What can schools do to support young people's mental health?

A (Ashani): What we know from the young people who have spoken to our counsellors is that there has been a sharp rise in anxiety around school and exams.

Schools can help by telling young people what support is available and encouraging them to engage in one-to-one and group session with us and by making it clear about what to expect when you get back to school. So that it's not a big shock on your first day back. It's also important that schools don't put too much pressure on young people or set unrealistic expectations during this difficult time.

Q (Keira): How can young people access your support?

A (Ashani): They can go to www.kooth.com and sign up. It is free for any young people in Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. You create your online login, so that you can use the site anonymously.

Any 11-25 year old can get free and confidential access to a counsellor. There's a forum with other young people who are going through the same thing, where you can support each other and there are actual counselling sessions for free.

Q: How can young people keep their mental health in a good place?

A (Ashani): Lots of young people are feeling very stuck. 1 in 5 are going through issues in family relationships right now.

In terms of what young people can do, I would say they can go to our activity hub where we've posted lots of suggestions. They could write down their feelings, create a coping box that you fill with items that make you happy, so that when you're feeling low you can go to the things that make you feel a bit more positive.

Just talk to people, that's the best thing for you, talk to your friends.

Q: How are waiting lists being managed with all the elective surgeries that have been postponed?

A (Serena): Everyone is working really hard to deal with the delays and to start seeing the most urgent patients (like cancer patients) again but it is a big problem.

Q: Can only humans get COVID?

A (Katie): No, you might have seen the news story about a cat testing positive for coronavirus and tigers in a Zoo too. I'm not sure why the animals were tested, in general animals aren't being tested so it's hard to comment on how rare it is.

Q: Can I get my cat tested?

A (Serena): We don't think that animals get symptoms or that they spread infection. So we're not sure why any animals were tested. It's best to use common sense and wash your hands after playing with your pets.

Q: Can young people go to see other people after school (like grandparents)?

A (Katie): Yes. You just need to make sure that you wash your hands and don't get too close. You shouldn't see anyone who has symptoms.

From August people will no longer have to shield but if they are vulnerable anyway, for example people who have to take regular steroid medication, use your common sense and don't put them at risk. Try and meet outside if possible, don't hug or kiss and wash your hands.

Q: When will appointments with specialists resume?

A (Serena): We never stopped. Consultations have been done via video link the whole time.

Q: Which test should we take?

A (Serena): It depends what you want from the test. The antibody test shows if your body has developed antibodies to the virus in the past. A negative result doesn't mean that you haven't had the virus. Some people take the antibody and find it's positive and they didn't even know they had the virus.

Or you can take the swab test to check if you have COVID-19 now. There's an issue around false negative results, where the swab technique hasn't been done properly.

Q: Does taking antibiotics affect your immunity?

A (Katie): No, the antibiotics will fight the infection you are taking them for but they won't affect your immune system

Q: Does COVID affect the brain?

A (Katie): COVID-19 mainly has respiratory symptoms but the virus clearly has some effect on the neurological system. We know that one of the symptoms is loss of sense of smell and taste which are all controlled by the brain.

There is not enough research to tell us why the virus has this impact but there are studies happening in France to look at patients from intensive care who have suffered memory loss or have been agitated.

Q: Are overweight young people more at risk?

A (Katie): There's no evidence to suggest young people who are overweight are more at risk but it's likely to be the same as adults. Healthy lifestyle choices are recommended.

Q: What are the Kooth figures for the rise in mental health problems among young people?

A (Ashani): There's been a 38% rise in reported mental health issues since last month's data release. Anxiety and stress in young people has gone up by 53% from last year, particularly in relation to the fear of catching COVID or worrying about a loved one. Sadness is up 211% and worries about school/college are up by 246%.

Our counsellors are telling us that this is partly to do with being stuck at home. Loneliness in young people is up 135% since last year. I'd tell young people to speak to Kooth, we don't turn anyone away.



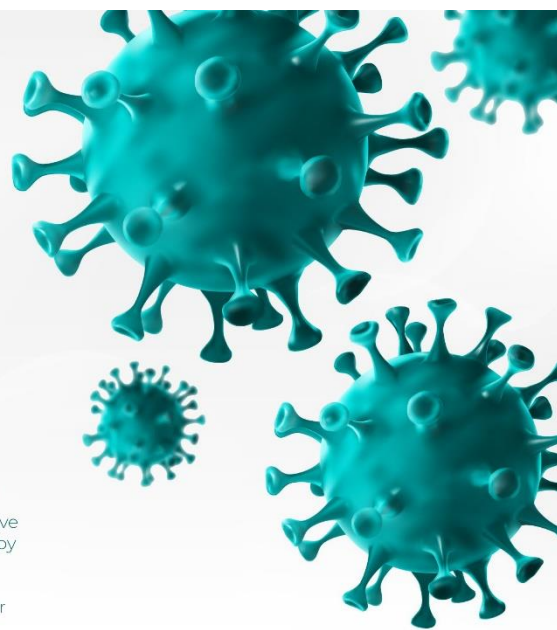
DATA RELEASE JULY 06 2020

Week 16: How Covid-19 is Affecting The Mental Health of Children and Young People (CYP)

New data released by Kooth shows the psychological toll the Covid-19 pandemic is taking on children and young people. The new figures highlight an increase in prevalence in eight key presenting issues.

It is particularly concerning to note that in the past year, the number of children and young people presenting with anxiety/stress symptoms have increased by 53%, those experiencing suicidal thoughts have increased by 40% and those presenting with loneliness have risen by 134.7%.

It's never been more important to offer safe, accessible and early help for those who are struggling now with their mental health and emotional wellbeing; technology offers us the ability to overcome the significant barriers we all face in delivering this critical support.



! This week, we've also released an in-depth analysis of how major COVID-19 news events have effected the mental health of adults. View the report at xenzone.com/week16adult

The Headline Statistics

Logins Up
+38%

Demand Continues to Rise for Kooth

We are seeing more young people than ever turning to Kooth for support. Now that traditional means of support are closed to many, it's clear that digital has a vital role to play in supporting mental health and wellbeing. Offering anonymity and freedom to access help when it's needed is key, we're there

Suicidal Thoughts See 40% Increase on Last Year, Accounting for 19% of all Issues on Kooth

"School is the only place I'm safe from taking my own life. But they can't take me now. Because of the risk, I have tried to take my life a few times. Everything seems to be bad and getting worse."
~ Anonymous Kooth User



Anxiety/Stress
Anxiety and stress is the largest presenting issue by volume.
Up 53% from last year



Sadness
Sadness now accounts for 9% of all issues presented.
Up 211% from last year



Self Harm
A worrying amount of CYPs are presenting with self harm issues.
Up 45% from last year



Suicidal Thoughts
A huge spike in CYPs presenting with suicidal thoughts
Up 40% from last year



Family Relationships
Relationships with family members remain strained.
Up 50% from last year



School / College Worries
Such as returning to school or handling education virtually.
Up 246% from last year



Friendships
Friendships have suffered while schools and colleges are closed.
Up 20% from last year



Loneliness
Our young people are growing lonelier during lockdown.
Up 135% from last year

What headlines can we pull from this data?

1. **Anxiety/Stress** sees 53% increase among young people
2. 1 in 5 Young People Struggling with Issues around **Family Relationships**
3. **Self-Harm** sees Major Increase in Prevalence under Lockdown
4. **Suicidal Thoughts** see 40% Increase on Last Year
5. Young People Struggle with **Friendships** During Lockdown
6. **School or College**-Related Mental Health Issues Surge
7. **Sadness** sees Threefold Increase under Lockdown
8. **Loneliness** Among Young People up 134%

The presenting issues are registered against a service user following any interaction that displays this issue. This is typically during counselling, but could also be during any other interaction, such as comments in a forum. The comparison to last year is based on the proportion of the users that have presented with the particular issue, compared to the proportion last year, during the same time period. Dataset size: 70,007



Q: Are all schools aware of Kooth?

A (Ashani): They should be. We're trying to reach young people who don't know about Kooth yet. We'll be getting in touch with the right people over summer to hopefully come to school assemblies in September.

Q: Are the figures improving since the easing of lockdown?

A (Ashani): No. For young people with pre-existing mental health conditions actually suffered more as there was nowhere to go for them. Things probably won't change until normal activities resume.

Q: How much does the RT-qPCR, Rapid antigen test, antibody test, cartridge PCR, CT-scan and x-ray actually cost to test a patient?

A (Katie): Imaging is quite expensive for hospitals but test and treatment for coronavirus is free for anyone going to an NHS hospital.

Q: Is it possible lots of people are asymptomatic?

A (Serena): This is the major problem with COVID-19. People might spread the virus but never get symptomatic. To actually know how many people have the virus without any symptoms we'd have to test everyone in the world.

Studies already show a big number of people who are asymptomatic. This is why you should wear a mask as you might be carrying the virus without knowing it