



## Community Advisory Committees

Name of Committee: Early Years Community Advisory Committee (EYCAC)

Meeting Date: **May 14, 2021**

A meeting of the **Early Years Community Advisory Committee** convened on **May 14, 2021** from **10:00a.m. to 12:00p.m.** in a **Virtual Zoom Meeting**, with **Community Co-Chairs: Pam McArthur and Jill Oakes** presiding.

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### Attendance:

Pam McArthur (Community Co-Chair/ Runnymede Adventure Club), Jill Oakes (Community Co-Chair/ YMCA Child Care), Diane Banks (Toronto Public Library), Patricia Chorney Rubin (George Brown College), Shiromie Ganesh (Heart Beatz Child Care), Anabela Ferreira (Woodgreen Child Care), Dan MacLean (Trustee), Nicola Maguire (LEF), Stephanie Nickle (Woodgreen Child Care), Kim Rogers (Sunshine Child Care), Ann Marie Schiraldi (Toronto Children's Services), Irena Setnik (Silver Creek Pre-School), and Patrina Stathopoulos (Dandylion Daycare)

Also present were TDSB Staff: Marisa Chiu (Executive Officer of Finance), Cynthia Grundmann (Senior Policy Advisor/Manager Early Years and Child Care Services), Karen Guthrie (Early Years Coordinator, Child Care Services), Liz Hoang (Child Care Services Manager), Nadejda Lekosky (Early Years Coordinator, Child Care Services), Anastasia Poulis (Centrally Assigned Principal, Early Years), Indushan Rajakulasingam (Business Analyst, IT Portfolio Management & Communications), and Peter Singh (Executive Officer, Information Technology/Information Management and Freedom of Information and Privacy)

Also present were Guests: Michelle Aarts (Trustee), Robert Spencer (Parent and Community Member- ICCAC)

### Regrets:

Rachel Chernois-Lin (Trustee), Jeff deFreitas (PLASP Child Care Services), Nancy Hendy (Toronto Children's Services), Jennifer Story (Trustee Co-Chair), and Lorrie Weddell (NYAD - Donwood)

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## **Part A: Recommendations**

No recommendation.

## **Part B: For Information Only**

- An update on EYCAC membership was provided by Community Co-Chairs' Jill Oakes and Pam McArthur. The following representative was introduced as a new member replacing past member Nicola Maguire, Director of Early Years Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF).
- TDSB staff shared the slide presentation, research data and a link from Ontario Public Health and Strides that was presented during the May 13, 2021 Toronto Child and Family Network (TCFN) meeting. The data was on the health and well-being of children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic (see attached).
- TDSB staff confirmed plans to run the Extended Day Program Summer Camp from July 5th to August 20<sup>th</sup> at select schools, pending approval from public health officials.
- An update was provided by Cynthia Grundmann, Senior Policy Advisor/Manager, Early Years and Child Care Services who shared the following information:

### **Emergency Child Care (ECC) update:**

- Emergency Child Care programs are currently operating at 23 sites in TDSB schools. These programs serve students in Grades K-6 whose parents/guardians are considered essential workers. TDSB recognizes the importance of this service for families and has committed to providing access to program space in TDSB schools. At this time, TDSB does not have any further information around when schools will reopen however confirmed that Emergency Child Care services for eligible families will continue for the duration of the remote learning period and until face to face instruction resumes.

### **Permits update:**

- At this time, the TDSB has not reached a decision on community access and summer permits. While TDSB has accepted summer permit applications, these will remain on hold until further direction is provided from the Province and Toronto Public Health.

### **TDSB School Calendar:**

- The proposed 2021 holiday calendar was sent to child care partners on April 26th and the draft 2021-22 school year calendar will follow shortly. Both have been submitted to the Ministry of Education and are pending approval.
- December 31st is TDSB's New Year's statutory holiday and as a result permits cannot be offered on this day.
- Toronto Children Services (TCS) shared that the budget process for licensed operators will not have any financial impact related to the December 31<sup>st</sup> statutory holiday closure. More information will be provided once the Children's Services budget cycle is finalized. Operators were encouraged to speak to their consultant about specific changes related to their program locations and operating days.
- It was confirmed that Before-and After-School Programs can operate summer programming until the first day of school instruction (TBC September 9, 2021), including on professional learning or professional development days in early September.
- This year the last day of classes for elementary students is June 29, 2021. The last elementary school PA Day is June 4, 2021.

<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/School-Year-Calendar>

### **Part C: Ongoing Matters**

- Peter Singh, Executive Officer, Information Technology/Information Management and Freedom of Information and Privacy, Indushan Rajakulasingam, Business Analyst, IT Portfolio Management & Communications, and Marisa Chiu, Executive Officer of Finance provided an update on the Wi-Fi access request for child care operators.
- Peter stated that TDSB is only looking at infrastructure that is currently in place for child care centres. There is no funding to facilitate the development of new infrastructure in order to provide Wi-Fi access to child cares. If a site (school location) does not have Wi-Fi infrastructure in place, TDSB is not in a position to initiate this installation. It was noted that child cares operating in exclusive space would not be included in wall to wall infrastructure.
- Peter shared that Wi-Fi service could be available this September if everything (administrative processes, etc.) is in place. Free service cannot be provided as the Board will incur costs to provide and manage this service to child cares.
- Peter and other departments are looking into how is TDSB going to charge and manage fees/payments for this service to cover TDSB costs. Some key questions that need to be addressed include: How is the user ID going to be maintained when a staff move from one location to another? What happens when a staff leaves and a new staff ID is required? It was noted that each time any service data is added/modified, TDSB resources are going to be needed.
- Marisa stated the billing process could be a quarterly, semi-annually, or annually to reduce the amount of transactions and related administration. It is expected that there will be substantial labour required initially to set up the vendors for billing and managing changes to users accounts/IDs.

Report Submitted by: Cynthia Grundman

# Health and Well-being of Children and Families during the COVID-19 pandemic

Sarah Carsley, PhD

Applied Public Health Science Specialist – Healthy Growth & Development

May 13, 2021

Toronto Child and Family Network

## Who I am

- I want to start by positioning myself as a settler on Indigenous land and as a white, cis-gender woman. I hold many privileges that I continue to benefit from including being White, able-bodied, fluent in English, gainfully employed and highly educated. I acknowledge that these identities affect the lens I bring to my work. I am committed to listening, acknowledging, and reflecting on the privileges I hold, and the knowledge I prioritize and share.

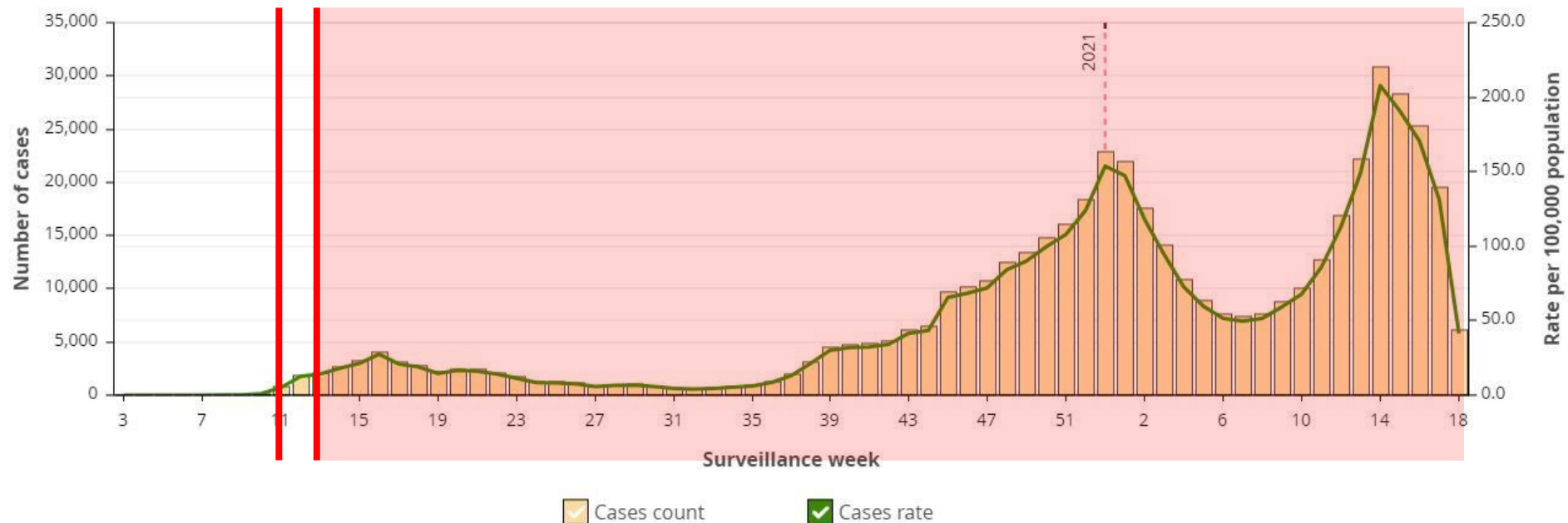
# Outline

- Describe evidence from our rapid review
  - “Negative impacts of community-based public health measures on children, adolescents, and families during the COVID-19 pandemic: Update”
  - Highlight specific Canadian data
- What happened to other public health services during COVID-19?
  - Briefly describe the impact of public health nurses (PHNs) redeployment on the Healthy Babies Healthy Children/Nurse-Family Partnership programs
- Identify some health inequities exacerbated by COVID-19
- Provide some suggested recommendations for services to mitigate these negative effects in communities

# COVID-19 in Ontario

- Immediate concern about how lockdown measures were going to affect children and families

COVID-19 weekly case counts and rates by episode date in Ontario



<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/infectious-disease/covid-19-data-surveillance/covid-19-data-tool?tab=trends>

# Initial review conducted in May 2020

- RQ - What are the negative impacts on health and well-being of public health measures implemented in response to a pandemic (e.g., COVID-19) on young children and families?
- Looked only at younger children (<12 years)
- Included evidence from other pandemics (e.g., SARS, H1N1)

The thumbnail shows the cover of a 'RAPID REVIEW' report from Public Health Ontario and Santé publique Ontario, dated 06/08/2020. The title is 'Negative Impacts of Community-Based Public Health Measures During a Pandemic (e.g., COVID-19) on Children and Families'. It lists 'Key Findings' such as limited evidence on negative effects, reported effects like decreased vaccination and mental health impacts, and the reduction in outdoor activities. It also defines the 'Scope' as a rapid review on potential negative impacts of community-based measures on young children and families during pandemics.

Public Health Ontario | Santé publique Ontario

**RAPID REVIEW**  
06/08/2020

**Negative Impacts of Community-Based Public Health Measures During a Pandemic (e.g., COVID-19) on Children and Families**

**Key Findings**

- Evidence on the negative effects of community-based public health measures on young children and families is limited. It includes studies from the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, and more recent studies from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reported effects of the COVID-19 public health response so far have been decreased vaccination coverage, decreased movement behaviour, impacts on nutrition (e.g., low physical activity, poor diet, increased screen time, and sedentary behaviour) and on children's mental health.
- The reduction in outdoor activities, free play, and social interactions may be associated with an increase in children's depressive symptoms, anxiety, irritability, boredom, and stress. These effects are in addition to potential financial stressors, such as unemployment and loss of income in families due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evidence shows community-based public health measures implemented in response to COVID-19 may be negatively affecting factors related to children's healthy growth and development.
- While we found no studies that examined recent reports of increased calls to helplines and police, this problem is important for future study, given school closures and disruptions in health care provider access may have resulted in reduced detection.

**Scope**

- Public Health Ontario (PHO) conducted a rapid review on the potential negative impacts of community-based public health measures in response to a pandemic on young children and families. Community-based public health measures aim to reduce disease spread during pandemics, in the absence of pharmaceutical interventions such as effective anti-viral treatment and/or a vaccine.<sup>1</sup>
- Measures at the community level include physical distancing, school and childcare closures, workplace closures, and limiting gatherings.<sup>2</sup> This review identifies and synthesizes existing literature published during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as recent respiratory virus pandemics and outbreaks.

Negative impacts of community-based public health measures during a pandemic (e.g. COVID-19) on children and families

1

# Updated in November 2020

- Focuses exclusively on studies published during the COVID-19 pandemic from May to October 2020
- Inclusion criteria was expanded to include adolescents, including the priority populations of LGBTQ, children with disabilities, and children with pre-existing conditions such as medical comorbidities and mental health problems
- The global response to COVID-19 is specific to COVID-19 epidemiology in each country or region; therefore, we have highlighted the study location rather than the exact public health measure enacted

## RAPID REVIEW

01/11/2021

### Negative Impacts of Community-based Public Health Measures on Children, Adolescents and Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Update

#### What is new in this update?

- This update focuses exclusively on studies published during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic from May to October 2020.
- We expanded our inclusion criteria to incorporate evidence of negative impacts in adolescent populations, including the priority populations of LGBTQ+, children with disabilities, and pre-existing conditions such as medical comorbidities and mental health conditions.
- We organized the findings by type of outcome rather than by type of public health measure (e.g. school closure, stay-at-home recommendation). The global response to COVID-19 is specific to COVID-19 epidemiology in each country or region; therefore, we have highlighted the study location rather than the exact public health measure enacted.

#### Key Findings

- Children's mental health and behaviour have been overall negatively impacted by the COVID-19 public health measures. Young children and adolescents were affected differently. Parents of young children reported more behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity, and conduct problems, while adolescents were more likely to have increased anxiety and depressive symptoms, increased suicidal ideation, and increased frequency of alcohol consumption for those reporting any use.
- Parental stress was a mediator in the association between exposure to COVID-19 public health measures and negative child outcomes. The level of parents' perceived stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate or buffer mental health and behaviour problems in children.
- Other child outcomes negatively impacted by the pandemic included movement behaviours (decreased physical activity, increased sedentary behaviour and screen time), increased food insecurity, negative educational outcomes, increased injuries occurring at home, and increased reports of child maltreatment.
- Health service utilization of tertiary care services (emergency department visits and hospitalizations) decreased substantially during the early months of the pandemic. However, it was reported that illness severity increased, and visits for mental health reasons increased in

Negative impacts of community-based public health measures on children, adolescents, and families during the COVID-19 pandemic: Update

1

## Research Question

- *What are the negative impacts on health and well-being of children, adolescents and families from the public health measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

# Methods – rapid review

- A rapid review is a form of knowledge synthesis based the steps of a systematic review, making certain compromises in those steps in order to be timely
  - No quality appraisal
- Multiple electronic database search in MEDLINE, Embase, PSYCINFO, CINAHL, SOCINDEX, and CHILD DEVELOPMENT & ADOLESCENT STUDIES for peer-reviewed studies
- Also did grey literature search and Google Scholar alert search
- Inclusion criteria:
  - During COVID-19 pandemic (about February-September 2020)
  - Children or parents with children <18 years
- Exclusion criteria:
  - Reviews with no methods, commentaries, editorials and conference abstracts

# Results

- The library database search identified 846 articles, of which 36 met inclusion criteria
- An additional 20 articles were retrieved from Google Scholar, including preprints
- Total of 56 articles and 7 grey literature reports

# Results

- Study design
  - 36 cross-sectional (2 repeated cross-sectional)
  - 5 longitudinal cohorts
  - 6 descriptive studies
  - 3 reviews
  - 1 case-series, 1 qualitative,
  - 2 mixed methods
- Study location
  - Canada
  - US
  - China
  - Italy
  - Spain
  - France
  - UK
  - Israel
  - Germany
  - Norway
  - Many more....

# Results

- Study population
  - All ages of children, multiple were only adolescents, mostly parent-reported outcomes
  - Sub-populations:
    - Children with severe obesity, physical disabilities, early life stress (ACEs), preexisting mental health issues
    - One study focused on adolescents identifying as LGBTQ

# Results - Outcomes

- Child mental health and well-being
  - Anxiety, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and general mental health outcomes (e.g. is your child's mental health worsening?)
  - Child behaviour – conduct problems, emotional problems, hyperactivity-inattention problems
  - Suicide rates, suicidal ideation, self-harm
  - Child maltreatment (reported physical and psychological abuse and neglect)
  - Substance use (alcohol, cannabis, vaping)

# Increased Depression Symptoms

- Based on a validated depression measure, all children (those with pre-existing mental health diagnosis and those without) experienced increased depressive symptoms during the 1st lockdown (Cost et al. 2021)
- Many children and youth without preexisting mental health problems have maintained high levels of depressive symptoms despite return to school in the fall (unpublished data)

Cost KT et al., Mostly worse, occasionally better: impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of Canadian children and adolescents. *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2021 Feb 26:1–14. doi: 10.1007/s00787-021-01744-3.

## Increased Substance Use

- A higher proportion of students reported their substance use (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis) *increased* during the second wave (December-March 2021; winter 2021) compared to the first wave (Spring 2020).
- Similarly, a higher proportion reported using substances to *cope* with COVID-19 (unpublished data)

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), COMPASS Team. Health behaviours of Ontario secondary school students during wave 1 of the COVID-19 pandemic. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2021. Available at: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/sch/2021/02/summary-report-compass-en.pdf?la=en>

# Parent-related outcomes

- Overall, parents reported higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression symptoms
- Parent-related outcomes
  - Parenting practices (harsh, focused soothing, structured, avoidant)
  - Parent-child relationships
  - Parental stress or perceived stress
  - Parenting stress
  - Parent mental health (anxiety or depressive symptoms)
  - Parent resilience
  - Family functioning

## Parent-related outcomes (2)

- **Ontario Parent Survey – spring 2020**
  - 1 in 3 parents or caregivers reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, and almost 60% reported symptoms that met the criteria for depression
  - Parents also reported difficulty in managing their children's behaviour (31%), and their child's anxiety and depression (48%)
  - 40% of parents reported their child's mood/behaviour had deteriorated
  - Family dysfunction was also measured with 21% of parents reporting getting into long arguments with their children and 49% indicating a high level of conflict with their spouse

Gonzalez A. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ontario families with children: findings from the initial lockdown [Internet]. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University; Offord Centre for Child Studies; 2020 [cited 2020 Nov 30]. Available from: <https://strongfamilies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OPS-Executive-Report-v6-FINAL.pdf>

# Nutrition and Food Insecurity

- Nutrition and food insecurity
  - 1 study examined food choices and weight control behaviours in adolescents that may be related to disordered eating
- We found that changes to nutrition and eating behaviours were not necessarily negative
  - Although food insecurity appears to be increasing at a population-level, eating habits improved for some individuals due to decreased exposure to restaurants and fast food options
  - However, anecdotally there have been reports from tertiary care centres (e.g. Sick Kids) that eating disorder risk behaviours have increased

# Movement behaviours (physical activity, sedentary behaviour, screen time, sleep)

- **Canadian Data: Maximum City Report – spring 2020**
  - 51% were sleeping more, 31% were spending more time trying to fall asleep
  - 83% were spending more time using technology
  - 53% were spending less time being physically active
  - 47% felt like they are not spending enough time outside and 49% are not connecting with nature

Maximum City. COVID-19 child and youth well-being study: Canada phase one executive report [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Maximum City; 2020 [cited 2020 Nov 30].

# Physical Activity/Outdoor Play

- Canadian data
  - 56% of children aged 5-17 years decreased outdoor activities
  - 53% had less walking and biking
  - 51% had less outdoor play
  - Indoor play increased by 53% and screen time increased by 79% (Mitra et al., 2020)
  - Only 4.8% of children and 0.6% adolescents were meeting the combined movement behaviour guidelines during COVID-19 restrictions.
  - Both children and adolescents had lower overall physical activity levels, less outside time, more sleep time and more screen time. (Moore et al. 2020)

Mitra R, et al. Healthy movement behaviours in children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic: exploring the role of the neighbourhood environment. *Health Place*. 2020;65:102418; Moore SA, et al. Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth: a national survey. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2020;17(1):85.

# Health services utilization

- Pediatric emergency department visits and hospitalizations
  - ED visits decreased by about 60-70%
  - In some cases severity of illness was higher than usual resulting in increased hospitalizations, however this result was inconsistent between studies
- Access to health care and community services
  - Delays in diagnostic services, cancelled medical appointments
  - Delays in parents seeking care for their children (“Coronaphobia”)
  - Reduced case openings for child protective services

## Limitation of the literature

- Majority are cross-sectional study designs
- Some studies had small sample sizes and lacked generalizability
- Convenience samples – possible selection bias
- Most data was parent-reported – possible information bias
  - However many of the studies used validated measures for mental health outcomes

## Limitations (2)

- The study samples in European, Australian, US, or Canadian studies were predominantly white families with high income and education.
- This may lead to these studies' results biased to the null, if families from diverse ethnicities or racialized communities, who are more likely to experience greater social and health inequities which may be exacerbated during the pandemic, are systematically underrepresented.

# Discussion

- Large quantity of evidence concerning the mental health of children and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic
- It was found that overall parent emotional regulation and mental health was highly correlated with their child's mental health and stress
- Family-related variables would be likely to constitute risk or protective factors for children
- The majority of the included studies determined perceived parental stress as a mediator of the association between COVID-19 public health measures and child mental health

## Discussion

- Although schools were re-opened in September and in March, the school environment has changed, extra-curricular activities have been canceled, and the effects of stress during crises are cumulative
- It might be expected that health and well-being outcomes will become more apparent and potentially worsen with time



PHN-PREP



# Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ontario's Public Health Home Visitation Programs for Families with Young Children: **An Environmental Scan**

March 2021

[www.phnprep.ca](http://www.phnprep.ca)

[www.phnprep.ca](http://www.phnprep.ca)

# What happened to other public health services during COVID-19?



- E.g., Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- Decreased overall services and in-person visits
- Increased case-loads for remaining nurses, reliance on family home visitors, need to prioritize/triage services

Jack, S. et al., (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on Ontario's Public Health Home Visitation Programs for Families with Young Children: An Environmental Scan. School of Nursing, McMaster University.

# Home visiting services during the pandemic

- A third of public health units stopped all in-person visits, and had substantial reduced capacity for virtual visits



Jack, S. et al., (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on Ontario's Public Health Home Visitation Programs for Families with Young Children: An Environmental Scan. School of Nursing, McMaster University.

# Health inequities

- Families who received continued care, nurses reported...
- Increased need to address health & social issues exacerbated by the pandemic
  - Intimate partner violence
  - Mental health
- Public health units have prioritized public health nurse home visits and supports for families with greatest needs, however case complexity has increased

# Health inequities

- BIPOC children/youth were 2.5 times more likely than their white peers to say they are afraid to go outside during COVID-19
- More than one third of East Asian children/youth reported experiencing COVID-19-related racism or discrimination in the fall
- Significantly more students who participate in school online or hybrid (compared to in person) reported worsened negative emotions (e.g. more worried, sadder, more alone)
- Children/youth who live in apartment buildings reported greater declines in physical activity, time outdoors, and play time vs. those who live in houses

Maximum City. COVID-19 child and youth study: Self-reported healthy behaviours, well-being and school experiences of young Canadians during the pandemic [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Maximum City; 2021 [cited 2021 Apr 13]

# Protective factors

- Behaviours that were associated with better subjective well-being and found the following to be protective factors:
  - Physical activity
  - Time outside
  - Less time on screens
  - Participating in school in-person
  - Having a pet
  - Having a friend or sibling to talk to
  - Having access to outdoor space

Maximum City. COVID-19 child and youth study: Self-reported healthy behaviours, well-being and school experiences of young Canadians during the pandemic [Internet]. Toronto, ON: Maximum City; 2021 [cited 2021 Apr 13]

# Considerations for community services

- Strategies to support school-aged children, particularly focused on improving mental health and increasing outdoor physical activity, will be needed
- Improving opportunities for time outdoors and connection to nature
  - Outdoor play
  - Recreational activities
  - E.g. sports, day camps, summer camps

# Public health priorities in a post-COVID recovery

- Mental health promotion
- Continuing work on adverse childhood experiences and promoting the enhanced 18-month well-baby visit
- Reintegration of public health services for children and families required for COVID-19 recovery
  - What aspects of virtual service delivery is maintained?
  - How do operationalize new models with client preference at the centre?

# Acknowledgments

- The PHN-PREP team at McMaster University
- The team at COMPASS for sharing their data with PHO
- Ontario COVID & Kids' Mental Health Study at Sick Kids Hospital
- Thank you to all of the managers, supervisors, and public health nurses in Healthy Growth and Development teams who have continued to work tirelessly through this pandemic

# Discussion/Questions



**For More Information About This Presentation, Contact:**

[Sarah.Carsley@oahpp.ca](mailto:Sarah.Carsley@oahpp.ca)

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Find out more at **PublicHealthOntario.ca**

**MEDIA RELEASE** | May 3, 2021

## **McMaster University's Offord Centre for Child Studies launches follow-up Ontario Parent Survey after 14 months of the pandemic**

**One year later, researchers want to know how parents have coped with COVID**

**HAMILTON, ON -** Researchers from McMaster University and Offord Centre for Child Studies have launched a follow-up province-wide survey to measure and understand how families with children are still coping with COVID-19. The new Ontario Parent Survey will launch Monday May 3, one year to the day of the first survey's launch.

"The follow-up survey is being conducted because we had such an amazing response from caregivers across the province," says lead researcher Andrea Gonzalez, Associate Professor and Tier II Canada Research Chair in Family Health and Preventive Interventions. "The findings were shared widely with many partners, including local public health units and Public Health Ontario, community and mental health agencies, Early Years Centres, school boards and other community agencies, which helped inform some service and program allocation."

The results of the 2020 survey were quite concerning, and provided a snapshot of the situation experienced by parents and caregivers after only three months of COVID and the initial public health measures. The most significant and troubling findings found almost 57 per cent of caregivers/parents reported high levels of depressive symptoms, and 40 per cent of caregivers /parents reported deterioration in their children's behaviour or mood. Parents had also reported high levels of conflict with their partner since the lockdown began , and just over one-third reported some loss of income. The 2020 study findings were summarized under five themes: 1) caregiver mental health; 2) children's mental health; 3) impact on family relations; 4) impact on financial needs; and 5) positive experiences. The new survey will continue these themes.

" We would now like to see how families are faring a year into the COVID pandemic and how the rollercoaster ride of public health measures and school openings and closures are having an impact on children and parents /caregivers," says Gonzalez. " We also want to know what parents and families may need moving forward as we slowly begin to emerge from the pandemic and plan for the future."

The research showed the stressors affecting families and households mostly are related to work/life balance - parenting and child care, assisting children with their schoolwork at home, and working more hours , many from home. Parents said they were concerned by the inability to visit family or get support from extended family members. And they also reported a serious distress about working on the frontlines or returning to work and exposing their family to the virus.

"The 2020 survey was conducted after only three months of COVID lockdown," says Gonzalez." It's now been 14 months since the COVID pandemic started. Ontario is in crisis state with a third wave of COVID and infection rates increasing. We've seen school closings, last minute remote learning, restrictions on some businesses but not others , and lockdowns and confusion that have made life for parents /caregivers and students very challenging."

Both study's general themes focus on the well-being and health of children and parents/caregivers, family stressors, family relations , and how COVID has had an impact on individuals and families.

"This follow-up study will help inform community practice on how to assist families through these very challenging times, now and in the future," says Gonzalez. "Given the findings of this survey may be used to inform service provision and the development of family resources , it is important to hear from families that reflect the diverse range of races, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and family structures of which the province is composed."

Starting Monday, May 3 and for six weeks, parents and caregivers can participate in the survey by going to [www.OntarioParentSurvey.ca](http://www.OntarioParentSurvey.ca)

The Offord Centre for Child Studies is a multi-disciplinary research institute established in 1992. Through collaboration across fields such as child psychiatry, psychology, epidemiology, pediatrics, policy development , social work, and nursing, the Centre's aim is to better understand children's mental health problems with the overall goal of improving the lives of children and youth.

For more information, contact:

**Andrea Gonzalez**

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INFORMATION ADVISORY | May 3, 2021

## McMaster University's Offord Centre for Child Studies launches follow-up Ontario Parent Survey after 14 months of the pandemic

One year later, researchers want to know how parents have coped with COVID

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The results of the 2020 survey were quite concerning, and provided a snapshot of the situation experienced by parents and caregivers after only three months of COVID and the initial public health measures.

- **The most significant and troubling findings found 57% of caregivers/parents reported high levels of depressive symptoms, and 40% of caregivers/parents reported deterioration in their children's behaviour and/or mood.**
- **Parents had also reported high levels of conflict with their partner since the lockdown began, and just over one-third reported some loss of income.**

The 2020 study findings were summarized under five themes: 1) caregiver mental health; 2) children's mental health; 3) impact on family relations; 4) impact on financial needs; and 5) positive experiences. The new survey will continue these themes.

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Both studies general themes focus on the well-being and health of children and parents/caregivers, family stressors, family relations, and how COVID has had an impact on individuals and families.

*“This follow-up study will help inform community practice on how to assist families through these very challenging times, now and in the future,” says Gonzalez. “Given the findings of this survey may be used to inform service provision and the development of family resources, it is important to hear from families that reflect the diverse range of races, ethnicities, socio-economic status, and family structures of which the province is composed.”*

Starting **Monday, May 3 for six weeks**, parents and caregivers can participate in the survey by going to [www.OntarioParentSurvey.ca](http://www.OntarioParentSurvey.ca)

Thank you for your support.

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The Offord Centre for Child Studies is a multi-disciplinary research institute established in 1992. Through collaboration across fields such as child psychiatry, psychology, epidemiology, pediatrics, policy development, social work, and nursing, the Centre’s aim is to better understand children’s mental health problems with the overall goal of improving the lives of children and youth.