

## COVID-19 Evidence Alert – 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020

### Welcome

We're coming to the end of the COVID-19 Evidence Alert in its current format. Since the first issue in June, we've been scanning for evidence on a range of prioritised themes to support the COVID response. As Phase 3 recovery plans within England are being finalised, it seems an opportune time to reflect on the evidence we've found so far and how this might inform reset and recovery.

The final three issues offer some brief reflections on the evidence we have scanned along with links to some of the studies which we think offer particularly interesting perspectives. These are organised by the following themes:

#### 18<sup>th</sup> September:

- Residential settings
- Screening and testing strategies

#### **25<sup>th</sup> September:**

- [Broader impacts on health outcomes](#)
- [Impacts of lifting restrictions](#)

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> October:**

- Long term rehabilitation needs
- Impact on non-COVID care

Our [full range of evidence scans, alerts, trackers and live searches](#) is available online. We have also curated a [Wakelet collection](#) of useful web resources on COVID and Coronavirus.

We will be updating the trackers as quickly as we can, so each tracker provides a one-stop collection of the evidence we've found since June. Our searches are by no means exhaustive so the trackers won't be comprehensive - but they will provide you with a useful core collection of evidence and insights to inform planning and provide a baseline for future analysis, research and evaluation.

We welcome your feedback. Did we miss any important themes in our approach? How could we improve on our scans and alerts? Please share comments with us via [mlcsu.covidevidence@nhs.net](mailto:mlcsu.covidevidence@nhs.net).

### Analytical Collaboration for COVID-19

As previously described the collaboration is using its expertise to focus on [questions](#) that the NHS may lack the immediate resources to look at, which may be more medium-term, cut across sectors, or benefit from independent analysis. We are gradually publishing analytical outputs so keep an eye on these pages for useful findings. You can keep up to date by following [@strategy\\_unit](#) on Twitter.

## Evidence reflections: Broader impacts on health outcomes

### Mental health:

The evidence base is largely concentrated towards the broader impacts of COVID-19 upon mental health and wellbeing outcomes. The mental health of **health and care workers** is of particular interest, due to the impact on individuals and the implications for ongoing delivery. A number of studies (both on emerging COVID impacts and on previous epidemics) reported increased stress and disturbances to mood and sleep from exposure to psychological distress [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#). Risk factors are explored with some insight into coping strategies and mitigations [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). One study reports a reluctance to seek support for mental health issues due to stigma [1](#).

For **existing users of mental health services**, there are impacts from changes to service delivery [1](#), [2](#). Face-to-face contact has been reduced with an increased reliance on virtual consultations. Whilst studies suggest that many users are maintaining contact, there are some reports of difficulties accessing support [1](#). Service users report deterioration in mood and symptoms [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#) and there are concerns of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on inequalities [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#).

For the **general public**, evidence suggests increased prevalence of mental health conditions, such as anxiety, arising from fear of infection, stress of lockdown and associated socioeconomic implications [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#). Social isolation and loneliness appear to be prominent risk factors for adverse mental health outcomes [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#) particularly for children and young people [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#) and older adults [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#). Lessons from previous epidemics and disasters can offer helpful insights [1](#), [2](#), [3](#). Lessons from SARS suggest a potential increase in death by suicide in older adult populations [1](#), [2](#). Some studies also highlight adverse impacts in relation to the wider economic and financial consequences of COVID-19 [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). Additional risk factors include bereavement [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), reactions to the inherent uncertainty [1](#) and misinformation/information overload [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) which may add to stress. From a community perspective, there are studies exploring the impact on wellbeing [1](#); potential resilience factors [1](#); and **community recovery and resilience** in relation to more vulnerable members of society [1](#), [2](#).

### Public health:

While most studies focus on a particular aspect of public health impacts, a useful report from July takes a broader perspective [1](#), providing an overview of lessons learned from previous outbreaks and economic crises as well as a framework for adopting a **whole of health approach**. Emerging evidence suggests adverse impacts associated with **lifestyle changes** during lockdown [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). For example, changes in eating habits [1](#), weight gain [1](#), sleep patterns [1](#), physical activity [1](#), [2](#), alcohol intake [1](#), as well as increased stress and anxiety, particularly for children and young people [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). Social isolation, changes to sleep patterns and family relationships are highlighted [1](#) and there are concerns regarding increased risk of abuse and neglect [1](#), [2](#). There is growing awareness of the relationship between COVID and **socioeconomic factors** [1](#). Researchers and analysts also reference concerns for **vulnerable groups** including people with learning disabilities; people who are shielding; children and young people; and marginalised groups [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#).

Conversely, improvements in air quality [1](#), [2](#) and reduced traffic accidents [1](#) have been reported, due to restricted travel; however, it is not clear how long these improvements will be sustained.

### Long term conditions:

The disruption to **service continuity** due to the pandemic response has an impact on those people managing long term conditions, due to interrupted treatment, restricted access to services, disrupted transport services and interrupted medication supply [1](#), [2](#). **Lifestyle changes** during lockdown may also contribute to exacerbations or deteriorations [1](#) (see above section on *Public Health for additional references on lifestyle changes*).

**Socioeconomic factors** also play a part, with those people in deprived areas particularly affected. Studies also highlight the negative impact of the pandemic upon the mental health and wellbeing of those with long term conditions such as diabetes [1](#), [2](#) asthma [1](#), [2](#) arthritis [1](#) dementia [1](#) and HIV [1](#). The stress and anxiety of lockdown and isolation may also affect ability to self-manage.

### Analysis from the COVID Analytical Collaboration offers valuable insights to inform recovery planning:

Mortality			
13/5/20 (updated 19/8/20)	<a href="#">Deaths from Covid-19 (coronavirus): how are they counted and what do they show?</a>	King's Fund	Veena Raleigh
4/6/20	<a href="#">Understanding excess deaths: variation in the impact of COVID-19 between countries, regions and localities</a>	Health Foundation	Charles Tallack et al
30/6/20	<a href="#">Understanding excess mortality: comparing COVID-19's impact in the UK to other European countries</a>	Health Foundation	Charles Tallack
Inequalities			
30/4/20	<a href="#">Reducing avoidable harms to children during Covid-19: what actions are needed?</a>	Nuffield Trust	Charlotte Paddison
20/5/20	<a href="#">Emerging findings on the impact of COVID-19 on black and minority ethnic people</a>	Health Foundation	Tim Elwell-Sutton et al
18/6/20	<a href="#">Emerging evidence on COVID-19's impact on mental health and health inequalities</a>	Health Foundation	Louise Marshall et al
1/7/20	<a href="#">Addressing race inequalities in the NHS needs engagement, commitment and a plan</a>	King's Fund	Richard Murray
3/7/20	<a href="#">Emerging evidence on health inequalities and COVID-19: June 2020</a>	Health Foundation	Louise Marshall and Isabel Abbs
25/7/20	<a href="#">Living in poverty was bad for your health long before COVID-19</a>	Health Foundation	Adam Tinson
31/7/20	<a href="#">Emerging evidence of COVID-19's unequal mental health impacts on health and social care staff</a>	Health Foundation	Esther Kwong and Louise Marshall

4/8/20	<a href="#">Emerging evidence on health inequalities and COVID-19: July 2020</a>	Health Foundation	Cara Leavey et al
30/8/20	<a href="#">Generation COVID-19 Building the case to protect young people's future health</a>	Health Foundation	Cara Leavey et al
17/9/20	<a href="#">Emerging evidence on COVID-19's impact on money and resources</a>	Health Foundation	Frank Soodeen
22/9/20	<a href="#">Poor housing can no longer be swept under the carpet</a>	King's Fund	Clair Thorstensen-Woll
<b>Mental health and wellbeing</b>			
25/6/20	<a href="#">What has Covid-19 taught us about supporting workforce mental health and wellbeing?</a>	King's Fund	Mary Docherty
25/6/20	<a href="#">How are changes to employment and finances impacting mental health during lockdown?</a>	Health Foundation	David Finch and Alexandra Eastaugh
26/6/20	<a href="#">Caring for our carers: what can COVID-19 teach us about NHS staff wellbeing?</a>	Health Foundation	Suzanne Wood
25/6/20	<a href="#">Five things we learnt from our polling on public perceptions during COVID-19</a>	Health Foundation	Tim Gardner
3/7/20	<a href="#">Mental health care in the time of Covid-19</a>	King's Fund	Helen Gilbert
28/8/20	<a href="#">Chart of the week: Sickness absence rates in the NHS in April were at their highest since records began</a>	Nuffield Trust	Lucinda Rolewicz
<b>Engagement</b>			
June 2020	<a href="#">London Covid-19 Dialogue &amp; Deliberation</a>	Ipsos Mori and Imperial College Health Partners	
29/7/20	<a href="#">Communicating about long-term health during the pandemic</a>	Health Foundation	Nicky Hawkins
September	<a href="#">The Health Foundation COVID-19 Survey – second poll</a>	Ipsos MORI/ Health Foundation	

### Cross-cutting themes

Don't forget to take a look at our [evidence map on inequalities and COVID-19](#) and our rapid scan on [COVID-19 longitudinal studies](#). We've also shared [live searches](#) on infodemics and information literacy.

## Evidence Reflections: Impacts of lifting restrictions

We set out to find out about the impacts of restrictions and subsequent easing, principally on health outcomes and behaviours. Our searches identified evidence on a range of themes:

- **Lockdown, mental health and psychological wellbeing:** The evidence reviewed in our initial [scan](#) included lessons from previous epidemics and emerging lessons from countries impacted earlier than the UK [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#). The evidence at that point suggested that lockdown restrictions, whilst reducing transmission [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#) and mortality [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), have a substantial impact on psychological wellbeing, symptoms of mental ill health (PTSD; depression) and levels of distress [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). It was also noted that lockdown policies may impact certain vulnerable groups more adversely than others (e.g. homelessness or people needing to shield) [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) and could exacerbate existing inequalities [1](#), [2](#). Consideration and planning for lifting lockdown restrictions [1](#) should therefore take into account the potential long-term impact of quarantine on the population and the potential need for support post-lockdown [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). There is also some evidence on public perceptions [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#) attitudes and behaviours [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#) as well as emerging evidence from existing and new longitudinal studies [1](#), [2](#).
- **Exit strategies:** Earlier in the pandemic, available evidence [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#) suggested that any relaxation of restrictions (intermittent or gradual) should be accompanied by complementary and comprehensive measures (e.g. large scale testing; contact tracing) to reduce the likelihood of a resurgence in infection rates. Without such measures, subsequent waves of infection are likely. The importance of social and behavioural science [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) and community engagement [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#) has been highlighted in the context of encouraging adherence to policy and countering misinformation.
- **Social and physical distancing** – there is some evidence on the effectiveness of distancing [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#) including lessons from earlier epidemics [1](#). One study explores the impact of “superspreader” events [1](#) and others explore the role of cluster infections [1](#), [2](#) in transmission. There has been some discussion in the literature on the origin of the 2m rule [1](#).
- **Use of face coverings** – earlier on in the pandemic, there was some debate on the effectiveness of face coverings, with disagreements over interpretation of evidence and concerns that advocating their use might restrict access to masks for healthcare professionals or could discourage distancing [1](#). A [counter argument](#) highlights the importance of interdisciplinary evidence and the balance of harms and benefits. A number of reviews supportive of the use of face coverings helped to influence current policy [1](#), [2](#) and a recent study has explored policies to encourage uptake [1](#).
- **Impact on healthcare system demand:** Some studies model the potential impact of lifting restrictions on healthcare system demand [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#). Studies from France [1](#) and Italy [1](#) suggest that without complementary measures to manage the spread of infection, lifting restrictions totally or intermittently would likely lead to a resurgence in cases, and overwhelming levels of demand on the healthcare system in the long-term (particularly for intensive-care capacity). ***Please note we have also prepared scans and alerts focused specifically on the impact on non-COVID care – we’ll be summarising this in our next issue of the alert, out on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.***

- **Impact of schools reopening** – there has been significant interest in the impacts of schools, colleges and universities reopening with a number of studies using models to explore potential impacts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#) and other work exploring perspectives [1](#) and impacts on wider determinants of health [1](#), [2](#).

Analysis from the COVID Analytical Collaboration offers useful insights to inform screening and testing strategies:

7/7/20	<a href="#">Learning from lockdown. How can we build a healthier future post-COVID-19</a>	Health Foundation	Jo Bibby and Cara Leavey
10/9/20	<a href="#">Chart of the week: What effect will the return to schools and universities have on infection outbreaks this autumn</a>	Nuffield Trust	Elizabeth Fisher et al
Continually updated	<a href="#">COVID-19 policy tracker: A timeline of national policy and health system responses to COVID-19 in England</a>	Health Foundation	Phoebe Dunn et al

This alert has formed part of a national evidence update service, provided by the Strategy Unit, as part of a collaboration to provide analytical support to the health and care system to help inform the initial response to COVID-19. Thank you for the very helpful feedback we have received since we published the first issue back in June. .

For more information, visit: <https://www.strategyunitwm.nhs.uk/covid19-and-coronavirus> or contact our Covid Evidence team on: [mlcsu.covidevidence@nhs.net](mailto:mlcsu.covidevidence@nhs.net)

[Please read on for exciting news about our new INSIGHT 2020 Festival...](#)

## Forthcoming event: Insight 2020

[The Strategy Unit](#) is hosting a 6-week festival of virtual events, called **Insight 2020**, exploring some of the challenges facing decision-makers in health and care in 2020 and beyond; emerging models of practice to make best use of analysis to inform decision-making; and some of the exciting work that is already happening in this area.

**Insight 2020: a festival of analysis and learning for the NHS, Local Government and our partners** will run from **28 Sep to 13 Nov 2020**. The festival will comprise a mixture of events, workshops and panels, representing conversations at a local, national and international level. For example, our festival launch session includes [Ben Goldacre](#) talking about 'How open approaches can revolutionise health data science in the UK' and [Andi Orłowski](#) on "Dangerous analytics...and how local analysts can save you!", with Q&A hosted by [Professor Mohammed A Mohammed](#). We will also be running a session on the COVID Evidence Conundrum, featuring a range of perspectives from people who have been involved in generating, using and applying evidence on COVID discussing what this means for how we use evidence to inform decisions.

**Who is Insight 2020 for?** We've collaborated with inspirational people and organisations across the sector to bring together a programme which has something for **everyone** who is involved with decision-making in health and care.

**What will Insight 2020 look like?** Sessions will be varied and flexible. People can commit as little or as much time as they'd like, and most of the sessions will be recorded so you can fit them into your schedule in a way that suits you. Every session is free.

Each week will focus on a central theme, starting with a 'headline' presentation on the Monday. This will be supported by targeted sessions and the week's speakers will convene each Friday for an interactive panel discussion and Q&A to respond to the key debates raised during the week. The festival themes are:

Week 1: Our decision-making context in 2020

Week 2: The role of the Midlands Decision Support Network

Week 3: The analytical priorities of the Decision Support Network

Week 4: Building momentum around addressing health inequalities

Week 5: The decision-making toolbox

Week 6: Making the most of our decision-making resources

**To register your interest** please go to our [Eventbrite page](#).

See over the page for the programme for Weeks 1 and 2...

Date and time	Eventbrite link	Event name
<b>WEEK 1 - Our decision-making context in 2020</b>		
<i>Spaces left!</i>		
<b>Monday 28th September:</b> (14:00 – 15:30)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 1: <b>Festival Launch – New perspectives on analysis and decision-making</b>
<b>Wednesday 30th September:</b> (14:00 – 15:00)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 2: <b>How has COVID-19 affected how we think about future social care?</b>
<b>Thursday 1st October:</b> (14:00-15:30)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 3: <b>Ipsos Mori - Better decisions through meaningful population involvement</b>
<b>Friday 2nd October:</b> (10:00-11:30)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 4: <b>Panel discussion. What have we learned from the Analytical Collaboration for COVID-19 so far, and what are the big analytical questions now facing us?</b>
<b>WEEK 2 - The role of the Decision Support Network</b>		
<i>New events released!</i>		
<b>Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October:</b> (14:00-15.30)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 5: <b>Headline 2: The role of the Decision Support Network</b>
<b>Tuesday 6th October:</b> (14:00-15:00)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 6: <b>How do we know what we know?</b>
<b>Wednesday 7th October:</b> (10:00-11:00)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 7: <b>The Evaluation Network</b>
<b>Thursday 8th October:</b> (10:00-11:00)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 8: <b>Developing the Network of Analysts in the Midlands</b>
<b>Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October</b> (14:00-15:00)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 9: <b>Developing the Analytical Workforce</b>
<b>Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October</b> (15:00-16:15)	<a href="#">Register</a>	Event 10: <b>The Decision Support Network – what's next?</b>