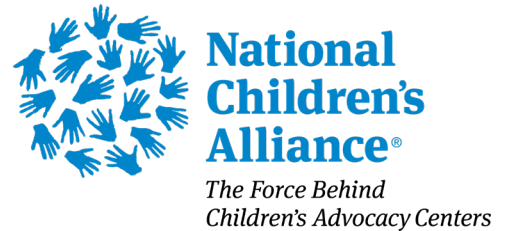


COVID-19 and child abuse



CACs and child welfare systems have cause for concern for kids in lockdown. Here's why.

Two factors affect the reporting of child abuse: where the abuse happens, and where the abuse is disclosed or discovered.

This period of isolation, while necessary to keep children and families safe from the deadly pandemic, is a perfect storm for child abuse to go unreported.

Abuse most frequently happens in the home.

- It is a sad fact that the vast majority of abuse already happens in the home. According to the latest national data, 81% of perpetrators are either a parent or an unmarried partner of a parent. (77.5% of abusers are parents, 3.5% are partners of parents)
- Additionally, 87% of cases happen within the family.
- Our own statistics collected at Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) around the country show that in a given year, about 20-25% of cases are when kids harm other kids. In many cases, that's a sibling.
- Kids are at greater risk at home than anywhere else.

We may already be in a child sexual abuse crisis, even without the pandemic.

- The latest national data showed a marked increase in child sexual abuse cases for the first time in over 15 years, up 6% from the previous year.

Kids in isolation have less or no contact with teachers.

- Teachers and other school staff make the largest proportion of child abuse reports; about one-in-five reports comes from a professional at school.
- With schools across the country closed or using online learning, teachers and other school professionals have little or no opportunity to see any children suffering from abuse in person, away from their abusers.
- Online education settings provide only a glimpse into the lives of students, and may be heavily monitored by abusers. Teachers may miss telltale signs of abuse.
- Just like when kids come back from summer vacation, a time when teachers get a wave of abuse disclosures from returning students, we expect that the reopening of schools after lockdown orders have been lifted will see a large uptick in reports from teachers.



Kids in isolation have less contact with others who might spot abuse.

- Legal and law enforcement professionals make 19% of all child abuse reports. With fewer overall social interactions, law enforcement agencies may see fewer overall reports of crime requiring a home visit or investigation that may result in the discovery of child abuse.
- Similarly, pediatricians and mental health specialists provide many touch points outside the home for kids who may be abused. 11% of reports come from medical professionals, while 6% of reports come from mental health professionals. When medical and mental health professionals defer non-essential care or provide it through telehealth platforms, they may also miss the signs.
- Other contacts, including non-parental relatives (6% of reports), friends and neighbors (3.8% of reports), and anonymous sources (7.7% of reports) will simply have less contact with children and fewer opportunities to spot the signs of abuse and act by making a report.

What we can do

- Lawmakers need to staff up child welfare systems and law enforcement partners and provide additional financial support to CACs to deal with that coming influx of reports of child abuse, as well as to support their operational needs during the outbreak.
- National Children's Alliance is providing the nation's network of 900 Children's Advocacy Centers are doing their best to continue critical services to kids safely during lockdown. Some of these services are a matter of life or death for kids.
- CACs and their partners are our nation's first responders to child abuse. They are putting their lives on the line, ramping up efforts to provide forensic interviews, case review, and therapy appointments for kids over the internet and using other methods to preserve social isolation to keep kids and families safe.
- Teachers and other child-serving professionals should find their local CAC at www.nationalchildrensalliance.org and contact them for online abuse prevention training opportunities and advice on how to help keep kids safe.
- CACs need support from communities more than ever. Contact them to help meet their needs through contributions and in-kind donations of needed supplies.

All national child abuse statistics cited from U.S. Administration for Children & Families, Child Maltreatment 2018. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2018>