

Statement

on the Situation of Children and Adolescents in the 2020 Corona Pandemic, Pedagogical-Medical Working Group Witten/Herdecke

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A group of educators, pediatricians, kindergarten and school doctors has been concerned with the question of how we can help children and adolescents in the current world situation to achieve more appropriate and safer living conditions and prevent risks to their psychosocial health and development. Solidarity is not a one-way street: a lot is being asked of children, while their own needs and concerns are hardly taken seriously or considered!

What impression of crisis management are we currently giving children and young people?

What health-promoting skills are we teaching them? Are they experiencing fearless sovereign adults who are convincingly conveying to them all the important factors needed for salutogenesis (namely, comprehensibility, meaning and manageability)?

We lack clarity and promising strategies on all levels. Salutogenesis requires just the opposite of the example that we are currently setting for children: we are dominated by fear and by the belief that only a vaccine can save us!

Should we develop natural immunity or wait for a vaccine?

It is hardly possible to develop effective group immunity during a lockdown. Furthermore, such living conditions weaken our immune systems through loneliness, existential distress, fear, depression and lack of closeness.

Waiting for a vaccine cannot and must not be our only strategy for ending this crisis. The reasons for this include the following:

- Vaccination does not promote health, but at best prevents a disease caused by a specific pathogen.
- The vaccine's effectiveness is very uncertain and may only be short-lived if viruses such as SARS-CoV-2 are subject to constant alteration (mutation).
- Due to the extremely short time allowed for development, vaccine safety will be particularly low.
- Vaccinations never lead to one hundred percent success, only to protection of some of the vaccinated people (it is still unclear how many).

Who is actually at risk or a danger to others in the corona pandemic?

Not children or adolescents! They could even help to protect others if they get sick (group immunity). This fact could help them to develop a positive self-image and healthy self-esteem. Children must not be burdened with responsibility for the life and death of their fellow human beings. Yet they are currently being taught that they harm others and that they are even a danger to their closest relatives, especially their beloved grandparents. This is causing unjustified disruptions in the relationships between children and grandparents. Children should learn that they bring joy, laughter, strength, hope and love to the world and their fellow human beings!

Until puberty, learning is highly dependent on the relationships that children have with their teachers!

Real experience of their teachers is indispensable for childhood educational development! Children learn through relationships. In this regard, mouth and nose protection are questionable and disproportionately disruptive.

The undifferentiated and suddenly seemingly imperative use of digital teaching methods for all ages is devastating for childhood learning ability and development. At the same time, we are currently experiencing a drastic increase in unhealthy and addictive behavior with regard to digital media. Children also increasingly lack outdoor exercise and exposure to light.

What effects on behavior and mental health are we seeing?

New anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders in children and parents sometimes take on grotesque forms. Excessive and fear-based hygienic measures often lead to corresponding psychological stress. Distancing rules are also leading to interpersonal behavior disorders in the wrong place and at the wrong time. For example, when a child falls or injures himself he must be comforted, touched and held without question or hesitation, if that is what he needs! Separation from loved ones does not keep anyone healthy; it promotes depression and deprives especially the youngest and oldest of a strong motivation to live! Not being allowed to say goodbye to a dying loved one leaves a deep emotional wound which often cannot really be healed by anything.

Serious injuries to body and soul of children are increasing!

For many children, especially from socially disadvantaged families, secure points of reference in their lives such as teachers, social workers, therapists and, last but not least, their friends are no longer available. Without the usual accompaniment by doctors and educators more abuse of children goes undetected. Moreover, there is a lack of refuge for the children, as well as lack of relief especially for working and/or single parents. More violence, abuse and overstrain in the domestic environment must not be accepted just to achieve questionable protection for other age groups!

Every additional day that children are exposed to this state of emergency endangers their health, weakens their immune systems and burdens our future.

What we can do directly to protect children and adolescents:

- Arrange for timely, epidemiologically accompanied opening of schools and day-care centres.*
- To prevent the onset of anxiety and insecurity in children and adolescents, we must take into account psychoimmunological and psychological developmental factors when teaching and implementing preventive measures. Every child needs to be addressed in an age-appropriate way. (A healthy psyche strengthens the immune system!)
- Adopt age-appropriate learning strategies taking into account the negative effects of undifferentiated and too early use of digital media.
- Avoid unnecessary hygiene strategies and adapt them to each age group in a differentiated way:
 - o Hand hygiene: Soap and disposable towels instead of disinfectants for all

healthy children and adolescents.

- o No surface disinfection in schools or at home: "Routine surface disinfection in domestic and public areas, including frequent contact surfaces, is not recommended even in the current COVID pandemic. Here, proper cleaning is the procedure of choice." (Source: RKI, see link below)
- o Effective mouth protection only for teachers and educators who have increased risk, not for healthy children and adolescents. (Airing the room instead of taking away air!)
- o No distancing rules for children!
- Enable interpersonal closeness in appropriate ways and stop preventing contact with grandparents.
- Strengthen children psychoimmunologically and salutogenically!!

*** Specifically, we recommend the rapid launch of a short-term pilot study, to investigate the opening of schools with and without restrictions in terms of immunity development and safety.**

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The following sources and statements on corona and children support our recommendations:

- Grundrechte sind kein Luxus nur für gute Zeiten von Juli Zeh, Focus Magazin Nr. 15, 2020, 4. April 2020: <https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/meinung-grundrechte-sind-kein-luxus-nur-fuer-gute-zeiten-id-11849613.html>
- Dachverband der kinder- und jugendärztlichen Verbände in Deutschland am 20.4.20: <https://www.dakj.de/stellungnahmen/stellungnahme-der-deutschen-akademie-fuer-kinder-und-jugendmedizin-e-v-zu-weiteren-einschraenkungen-der-lebensbedingungen-von-kindern-und-jugendlichen-in-der-pandemie-mit-dem-neuen-coronavirus-sar/>
- Deutsche Liga für das Kind: <http://liga-kind.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Liga-Stellungnahme-Corona-200420-final.pdf>
- On the website <http://www.co-ki-eltern.de> there is a questionnaire for parents to assess Covid-19 cases, with literature for parents on corona in children. Professional literature can be found on the websites <https://co-ki.de/> and <https://www.feverapp.de/corona>
- From the newsletter 2020/15 of the Swiss Pediatric Society on COVID-19 and school opening: <https://www.kinderaerzteschweiz.ch/Fuer-Mitglieder/Coronavirus---COVID-19>
- Even before the discussion about mask protection began, at the beginning of April, the renowned medical journal Lancet published a report concluding that school closures to contain corona viruses have no or only a minimal effect. [School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: a rapid systematic review. Prof Russell M Viner at al, Lancet I Volume 4, Issue 5](#)
- Children probably play only a minor role in the transmission of the disease. (*Krankes Kind steckt keinen an. 172 Kontaktpersonen von Corona verschont. N-tv.de I Montag, 20.4.2020*)
- It can be assumed that the mortality rate of Covid-19 in children is close to 0. (*Global Covid-19 Case Fatality Rates. CEBM.net I Jason Oke, Carl Heneghan I Updated 22nd April 2020*)
- Recommendations of the Robert Koch Institute on hygiene (including surface disinfection in domestic and public areas): https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/nCoV.html