

April 16, 2020



## Health Nexus Weekly Bulletin

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### COVID-19 EFFECTS ON FAMILY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

#### EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE

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### **Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Child Learning and Development in the Context of Social Inequities.**

As schools, childcare centres and several social services remain closed or have limited access to slow down the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, many families face challenges related to their children's healthy development and welfare.

During the pandemic, children will continue to learn and develop under the influence of multiple factors, including the environment at home and the existing resources to help them and their caregivers during the pandemic.

*The [Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child](#) created a great infographic showing the importance of supporting families during these difficult times, especially those facing adversity and inequity during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as inadequate housing and shelter, food insecurity and lack of responsive and dependable childcare.*

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Families and children facing high stress levels related to poor determinants of health may be at increased risk for mental and emotional burnout and need to be closely monitored using available measures, while necessary knowledge, professional support, and referrals are provided.

On April 14th, the Child Welfare League of Canada has issued a [Guidance Note](#) on maintaining connections for children and youth in the context of COVID-19, and emphasized the importance of considering the rights and needs of children in the pandemic era. Children and families with existing socio-economic vulnerabilities and those living in overcrowded settings are particularly at risk of harmful impacts of the emergency health protection measures and isolation, and a creative approach should be implemented to maintain the minimal level of social and service connections necessary for children and youth to meet their relational and emotional needs (Child Welfare League of Canada, 2020).

Front-line providers are encouraged to stay connected with families, especially those screened at-risk for the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, while providing access to necessary social services and supports. University of Toronto Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development has developed a [Fact Sheet on Child Welfare and Pandemics](#) stating that "case management practices should be informed by current knowledge of COVID-19 and specifically targeted for the most vulnerable children and communities" and "strategies should consider individual children, promote strengthening of family and caregiving environments, and engage children's communities" (2020).

Families can also be supported with the following resources to help them cope and promote healthy child development:

- Health Nexus Best Start [Children See Children Learn Online Resource](#) can help families cope with stressful situations arising from social and physical isolation and create more positive ways to teach children and promote long-lasting positive relationships.
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- Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child: *Activities Guide - Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence*. <https://bit.ly/2K6LnlG>
- UNICEF: *Indoor play ideas to stimulate young children at home*. <https://uni.cf/3akLZFv>
- UNICEF: *How to protect your family's mental health in the face of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. <https://uni.cf/2VdOsNt>
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee: *"My Hero is You". A book to help families understand and cope with COVID-19*. <https://bit.ly/2KcfjDg>

Service providers who suspect or need to respond to child maltreatment can access the resources below to ensure child welfare and help mitigate the negative impacts on child wellness and development:

- *Signs of Safety: Creating Rigorous, Sustainable Safety Plans when Parents, Children and Safety Network Members are Physically Isolated*. <https://bit.ly/3cu5Qn7>
- WEBINAR: Protecting children from abuse in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-hosted by: CASW, Children First Canada, CWLC. <https://bit.ly/3ckQOjp>
- End Violence Against Children: *Protecting Children during the COVID-19 Outbreak*. <https://www.end-violence.org/protecting-children-during-covid-19-outbreak>

Health Nexus is also pursuing a partnership with the [Ontario Association with Children's Aid Societies](#) to create an active collaboration and virtual supports and resources for front-line providers, as well as families and children who are negatively affected by physical and social isolation and face violence and abuse related to COVID-19 Pandemic.

To learn more about this emerging partnership and resources, please email Health Nexus Team Lead Hiltrud Dawson at [h.dawson@healthnexus.ca](mailto:h.dawson@healthnexus.ca).

Additional Resources on Child Welfare:

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- ALIGN Association of Community Services Together for Children and Families: *ALIGN COVID-19 Resources*. <https://alignab.ca/covid19/covid-19-resources/>

References:

Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child: *What Is COVID-19? And How Does It Relate to Child Development?* <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/what-is-covid-19-and-how-does-it-relate-to-child-development/>

Best Start by Health Nexus: *Children See Children Learn Website*. <https://childreenseechildrenlearn.ca>

Child Welfare League of Canada: *Guidance Note - maintaining connections for children and youth in the context of COVID-19*. [https://7f9b59af-af92-41cd-8e6c-aa2870f170de.filesusr.com/ugd/f54667\\_ae44723c03574d79b2a40a7218059924.pdf](https://7f9b59af-af92-41cd-8e6c-aa2870f170de.filesusr.com/ugd/f54667_ae44723c03574d79b2a40a7218059924.pdf)

University of Toronto Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development: *Fact Sheet on Child Welfare and Pandemics*. <https://bit.ly/2RIJHtk>

**FAMILY VIOLENCE**

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The [New York Times article](#) on COVID-19 suggests that the rising rate of domestic abuse is a new worldwide crisis, and describes additional risks people in unsafe home situations can face during the COVID-19 era.

- People exposed to violence within their family can access [Shelter Safe website](#) that provides a map of Ontario with clickable links to local shelters that would be available to a person and family in need.
- Most shelter websites have an option to hide the page from their search history, so individuals at risk are encouraged to use this tool in order to keep themselves as safe as possible.
- Child protection services are still operational and act according to their mandate with the modification of services to accommodate families as per current public health regulations.
- Community service providers can access child protection services not just for reporting purposes, but also for the support for families who are in crisis. Without regular community and service connections, children can be at higher risk of unreported abuse and continued unsafe conditions at home.
- Community members are encouraged to check with neighbours and program clients; especially those who may seem to be at risk. This may be the time to reach out in a safe, non-intrusive way to offer friendship and support.
- Public Health Units are operational and can be a safe place for individuals and family members to reach out for child and family health-related programs and services. This connection is often very important for families to get them further connected to more intensive and protective services when needed and without the perpetrator being aware of any potential safety planning.

Additional resources:

- Search for Local Public Health Unit located in Ontario: <https://www.phdapps.health.gov.on.ca/phulocator/>
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For further information, please visit the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Society at <http://www.oacas.org>. or reach out to Health Nexus Consult Angela Geddes at [a.geddes@healthnexus.ca](mailto:a.geddes@healthnexus.ca).

#### References:

The New York Times: *A New COVID-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

## COVID-19 AND DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

### **Access to Clean Water.**

In order to stay healthy and protect oneself and others around from COVID-19, current Public Health recommendations emphasize the importance of frequent hand-washing as one of the critical means to prevent the spread of the virus.

However, many Indigenous communities and other under-housed populations have difficulty finding clean water to wash their hands or bathe and are under "boil water" advisory or "do not consume" advisory.

[Health Canada](#) guidance for the communities with "boil water" advisory or "do not consume" advisory is to still use water to wash hands with soap, as well as use water for personal hygiene. However, it is stated that infants and toddlers should be sponge bathed in order to avoid accidentally swallowing the water (Government of Canada, 2020).

If communities are under "do not use" advisory, Health Canada states that tap water should not be used, and only bottled water with soap or hand sanitizer should be used for ensuring hand hygiene.

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There are still concerns about families and communities not having access to clean or bottled water due to financial and/or transportation challenges that are exaggerated by COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have been raised by community advocates and are still awaiting resolution.

To get more insights about how the COVID-19 pandemic affects different levels of the society based on determinants of health, please access webinars by the [National Collaborating Centre for the Determinants of Health](#).

### **Access to Safe and Affordable Food.**

Family access to safe and affordable food is impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

According to [Food Banks Canada](#) (2020), food banks across the country are currently facing the following issues:

- Drastic declines in the number of volunteers that are able to support their work in the days/weeks ahead.
- Concerns about the amount of stock they have access to as a dwindling workforce means fewer pickups.
- Most food banks are worried about how to financially support themselves through this crisis and beyond.
- While the public prepares for possible impacts of COVID-19, food bank users cannot afford the same measure, leaving them more vulnerable.

Even though many food banks remain open with modified hours to respond to public health mandate, they are currently running out of food and resources to support those families and community members who are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic (Feed Ontario, 2020).

To respond to this crisis, on April 3rd, 2020, the [Government of Canada](#) announced an investment of \$100 million to improve access to food for Canadians facing social, economic, and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Community providers who work directly with families can help them navigate to available supports and/or the closest operational food bank by directing them to these resources:

- Feed Ontario: *Find a Food Bank*. <https://feedontario.ca/need-help/find-a-food-bank/>
- Food Banks Canada: *Find a Food Bank*. <https://www.foodbanksCanada.ca/utility-pages/find-a-food-bank.aspx>

### **Access to Safe and Affordable Housing.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, staying at home has become the most emphasized public health measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

However, as stated in Maclean's article '[You can't #stayhome if you have no home](#)' (2020), some people face multiple barriers to accessing safe and affordable housing, and/or shelters.

"Housing has become the frontline defence against coronavirus. Home has rarely been more of a life or death situation" - Leilani Farha, UN Rapporteur on the Right to Housing ([Canadian Observatory of Homeless](#), 2020).

On April 4th, 2020, [the Government of Canada](#) announced the following supports for people experiencing homelessness, and people in need of shelter as a result of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- \$157.5 million to address the needs of Canadians experiencing homelessness through the Reaching Home program
  - \$40 million to be given to Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), up to \$30 million of which will address immediate needs of shelters and sexual assault centres
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- \$10 million to Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserve and in Yukon to support Indigenous women and children fleeing violence

[The city of Toronto](#) is also acquiring hotels and rental buildings for homeless people and families in response to the pandemic.

Front-line providers who work with families and children facing inequities and barriers to safe and affordable housing and shelter, can access these resources to support homeless families:

- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness: *Finding and Securing Housing in a Pandemic*. <https://bit.ly/2ypwIFN>
- ShelterSafe. Women's Shelters Canada. <https://www.sheltersafe.ca> and <https://endvaw.ca/home/>

Additional Resources:

- Women's Shelters Canada: *Resources for VAW Shelters and Transition Houses Responding to COVID-19*. <https://bit.ly/2VwLtPi>
- Ontario Housing First Regional Network Community of Interest (OHFRN-Col) Webinar: *COVID-19, Homelessness and Housing First*. <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/ohfrn-coi-webinar-covid-19-homelessness-and-housing-first-tickets-102261314344>
- Global Network of Women's Shelters (GNWS) and Asian Network of Women's Shelters Webinar: *Coronavirus and Women's Shelters: Planning, Preparation and Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/coronavirus-and-womens-shelters-planning-preparation-and-response-covid-19-pandemic%C2%A0>

References:

Government of Canada: *Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Indigenous communities*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298>

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National Collaborating Centre for the Determinants of Health: *Health equity, determinants of health and COVID-19 Webinars*. <http://nccdh.ca/connect/workshops-events/>

Food Banks Canada: *COVID-19 | Impact on Food Banks and How You Can Help*. <https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/COVID-19.aspx>

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada: *Prime Minister announces support for food banks and local food organizations*. <https://bit.ly/2VxSGhY>

McClean's: *You can't #stayhome if you have no home*. <https://bit.ly/3bd2Vio>

Canadian Observatory of Homeless: *Responding to Homelessness in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic*. <https://bit.ly/2XGEtSD>

Government of Canada: *Canada announces support to those experiencing homelessness and women fleeing gender-based violence during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*. <https://bit.ly/34IMZle>

CityNews: *City of Toronto acquires hotels, rental buildings for homeless in response to coronavirus*. <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2020/03/29/toronto-homeless-coronavirus-hotels/>

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**Visit [our resources page](#) to discover all our many evidence-based, up-to-date resources!**

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