

Pandemic recovery for kids goes well beyond keeping schools open

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The impact virtual school had on kids goes well beyond academics, say Children's National Hospital experts in a new *JAMA Pediatrics* editorial. From the beginning of the pandemic, new data shows that school

closures for in-person learning led to:

- School disengagement
- Mental health challenges
- Unhealthy weight gain
- Food insecurity
- Immunization delay
- An increase in cases of new-onset Type 2 diabetes

"The toll that school closures and [social isolation](#) has had on kid's mental health cannot be overstated," says Danielle Dooley, M.D., M.Phil., medical director of Community Affairs and Population Health in the Child Health Advocacy Institute at Children's National Hospital. "As the latest Omicron wave has shown, these discussions are not behind us. We must continue to fully weigh how each decision can impact the lives of children."

She collaborated with other Children's National experts in the new editorial. They discussed how Viner et al—a study appearing in the same issue—present an important review of the impacts of school closures. The researchers urge a balance between measures to contain COVID-19 and to support the physical and mental health of kids.

"The events and influences in childhood and adolescence have long-lasting impacts on the health and well-being of youth," says Dr. Dooley.

Looking at the prospect of COVID-19 becoming endemic in our communities, Dr. Dooley stressed the importance of continually assessing the impact of the pandemic on youth. This includes the impact of the pandemic on education, [health care access](#) and disparities, family stress and functioning, among others.

In the editorial, Dr. Dooley et al. say changes need to be made at the

practice, research, policy, systems and school infrastructure level. They write that while children are resilient, that resiliency requires systemic support, investment and more research into the short-, medium-, and long-term impacts on kids.

Children's National Hospital continues to be a leader in addressing these impacts. From [clinical care](#) to partnerships and collaboration with local school systems and community-based organizations, Children's National takes a [holistic approach](#) to the needs of children and families. Additionally, with funding from the United Health Foundation, Children's National has deployed its Mobile Medical Unit. The clinic meets families where they are, in their communities, to deliver immunization services and comprehensive well visits to children and adolescents.

Hope Rhodes, M.D., M.P.H., medical director for the Mobile Medical Program at Children's National, says, "This is a critical part of the pandemic response, both to ensure children do not fall further behind in immunizations and to provide additional access point options for families to receive immunizations."

More information: Danielle G. Dooley et al, Pandemic Recovery for Children—Beyond Reopening Schools, *JAMA Pediatr.* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.3227](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.3227)

Provided by Children's National Hospital

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