

COVID-19: Child protection risk issues and practice considerations

As the pandemic continues to impact on the health of families and their access to goods, resources and family and community connections, children may be more vulnerable to dangers and risks as a result.

We have set out considerations and tips specific to the type of child protection risks the child may be experiencing. The information is not exhaustive and is intended to highlight just some key considerations. Access your casework specialist and the [clinical issues team](#) to provide responsive advice to these emerging issues.

General practice tips

- Give information to children and families about Covid-19: look at our practice advice about this.
- Provide soap and check the family have access to clean, running warm water in their home. Show them how to wash their hands properly.
- Ask if they have basic goods like medicines, thermometer, nappies, toilet paper, non-perishable foods and phone credit. If they do not, arrange for them to receive these.
- Consider how to respond safely to Aboriginal communities during the pandemic: read our practice advice about this.
- Proactively organise network members to reduce isolation and plan non-professional supports: read practice advice about how to do this during the pandemic.

Domestic violence

Increased isolation alongside psychological, physical and financial issues are likely to increase the frequency and severity of violence experienced by women and children. Different types of coercive control tactics may also be used by the man using violence.

What to do

Read practice advice about these key considerations and tips about how you can respond to these.

Mental health

Parents are likely to experience increased stress, anxiety and isolation during the pandemic. They may have more difficulty accessing therapeutic and practical services and have less time away from children and caregiving responsibilities.

What to do

- Check they have enough prescribed medications. If they access a larger supply, plan with them how they can safely store medications.
- Ask what will assist them to manage any additional stress or worry.
- Arrange network members to commit to specific and time-framed responsibilities to check in with each parent and every child and to provide assistance and support.
- Contact mental health and family service providers including prescribing doctors and counsellors to develop a plan if the family are quarantined or services are providing reduced supports. Do this in partnership with the family.

Problematic use of alcohol and other substances

Family members who experience problematic use of alcohol or other substances may experience increased difficulty accessing supports, medications and services. Additional pressures such as financial and employment issues, increased isolation and child care responsibilities may increase the possibility for a lapse.

Being out in the community in order to access substances, as well as risks in the environments that substances are used, may place family members at greater risk of contracting Covid-19.

What to do

- Check how they will safely access methadone or other substance use medications. If there are changes to protocols because of the pandemic, find out what these are. Help them plan how they will manage these changes and plan for safe storage of methadone or other medicines.
- Find out if local support groups such as AA and NA are still taking place. Plan together how they can access alternative addiction supports if these groups or other services, stop for a period.
- Talk through the specific stressors that these changes to daily life may create and what supports could assist them to manage these in order to prevent a lapse. And if they do lapse, what they can do.
- Actively organise the family network and support services to plan caregiving responsibilities and supports.

Neglect

Children who are experiencing neglect, most particularly environmental, physical or medical neglect, may be vulnerable to contracting Covid-19, to more serious symptoms if they do contract it, and not receiving timely and appropriate medical attention.

What to do

- Find out about any existing health conditions each child may have. Pay particular attention to conditions that may increase their vulnerability to Covid-19 such as

asthma, respiratory illness, heart abnormalities or malnutrition. Seek medical advice about any health conditions.

- Find out about any disabilities children may have that reduce their ability to wash their hands.
- Make sure the family have access to soap, clean water, and wherever possible, hand sanitiser.
- Ask if they are having any extra difficulties accessing food, toilet paper or other goods. Arrange for them to receive these. Make sure they have phone credit.
- Make sure that the family home has heating for colder evenings and family members have warm clothes as colder weather comes.
- Create a plan together about what to do if one of the family members becomes sick, including who to contact, how to get there, what symptoms to watch out for and any changes to sleeping arrangements,
- Develop a plan for who might care for the children if a parent becomes sick and how this will happen.
- Find out if there are any changes to their usual support network as a result of the pandemic, such as Elders or grandparents that help with children who may not be able to assist, or services who are now changing or limiting what services they provide.
- Activate the family network, especially during periods when the children are in less contact with community. Read more about organising network during the pandemic.