

COVID-19: Heightened Risk of Abuse and Neglect

Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect has never been more critical

Adjusting to life changes in response to COVID-19 may be overwhelming for children and adults.

While families across South Carolina are doing the best they can to cope with school and workplace closings, stressors like lost income, lack of child care, food insecurity, less access to healthcare and other resources, along with separation from social support systems, can take an emotional toll.

If you witness or suspect a situation that threatens the safety and wellbeing of a child or vulnerable adult, please call **888-CARE4US (888-227-3487)**.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services and other agencies are poised to help families remain stable and strong during this difficult time.

Additional resources related to reporting child abuse and neglect, including the Mandated Reporter Guide (overview of mandated reporter requirements and how to make a report) are available on the Children’s Law Center website at <http://childlaw.sc.edu>.

The chart below, developed by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, shows some of the factors contributing to increased risk of abuse and neglect during the current pandemic.

Child Protection Risks¹

Some of the child protection risks below are observed in the current COVID-19 pandemic and some are potential risks observed in previous infectious disease outbreaks.

Risks presented by COVID-19 and related control measures	Causes of risks
Child Protection Risk: Physical and emotional maltreatment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced supervision and neglect of children• Increase in child abuse and domestic/interpersonal violence• Poisoning and other danger and risks of injuries to children• Pressure on or lack of access to child protection services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Childcare/school closures, continued work requirements for caregivers, illness, quarantine/isolation of caregivers• Increased psychosocial distress among caregivers and community members• Availability and misuse of toxic disinfectants and alcohol• Increased obstacles to reporting incidents
Child Protection Risk: Gender-based violence (GBV)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased risk of sexual exploitation of children, including sex for assistance, commercial sexual exploitation of children and forced early marriage• Pressure on or lack of access to child protection/GBV services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced family protection of children• Reduced household income and/or reliance on outsiders to transport goods and services to the community• Girls’ gender-imposed household responsibilities such as caring for family members or doing chores• Increased obstacles to reporting incidents and seeking medical treatment or other supports

Risks presented by COVID-19 and related control measures	Causes of risks
Child Protection Risk: Mental health and psychosocial distress	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distress of children due to the death, illness, or separation of a loved one or fear of disease • Worsening of pre-existing mental health conditions • Pressure on or lack of access to MHPSS services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased stress levels due to isolation in treatment units or home-based quarantine • Children and parents/caregivers with pre-existing mental health conditions may not be able to access usual supports or treatments • Quarantine measures can create fear and panic in the community, especially in children, if they do not understand what is happening
Child Protection Risk: Child labor	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement of children in hazardous or exploitative labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss or reduction in household income • Opportunity or expectation to work due to school closure
Child Protection Risk: Unaccompanied and separated children	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation • Becoming unaccompanied or child head of household • Being placed in institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of parents/caregivers due to disease • Isolation/quarantine of caregiver(s) apart from child(ren) • Children sent away by parents to stay with other family in non-affected areas
Child Protection Risk: Social exclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social stigmatization of infected individuals or individuals/groups suspected to be infected • Increased risk/limited support for children living/working on the street and other children already at risk • Increased risk/limited support to children in conflict with the law, including those in detention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and racial discrimination of individuals/groups suspected to be infected • Disproportionate impact on more disadvantaged and marginalized groups • Closure/inaccessibility of basic services for vulnerable children and/or families • Disruption to birth registration processes due to quarantine
<p>¹The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic, Version 1, March 2020</p>	

SC law encourages all persons to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

If you witness or suspect a situation that threatens the safety and wellbeing of a child or vulnerable adult, please call:

888-CARE4US (888-227-3487)