



Mass Testing of Children is “Harmful, Invasive and Unevidenced” and Needs to Stop, Scientists Tell MPs

Description

UK: The mass testing of healthy children is “invasive and unevidenced”, causes significant damage to children and needs to stop, scientists and clinicians have [told](#) MPs and Peers.

The comments came at a meeting of the [Pandemic Response and Recovery All-Party Parliamentary Group](#) of cross-party MPs, which was hearing whether there is a case for the continued mass testing of healthy children by schools and nurseries.

Co-chaired by Conservative MP Esther McVey and Labour MP Graham Stringer, the group examined the pros and cons of testing in schools along with the growing concerns about the likely physical and mental health harms caused by constant testing.

Ms McVey said the evidence they heard is clear and “testing in schools must stop”.

The announcement made by the Prime Minister that face coverings no longer need to be worn in schools from January 27th was very welcome. However, children are still routinely being asked to take tests, even primary school children, which goes against Government guidance, regardless of whether they have symptoms. The threat of school closures may have been lifted but hundreds of thousands of children are still missing yet more schooling thanks to constant testing and the requirement for healthy children to isolate. We know children are not drivers of transmission. The evidence presented by our experts found no benefits to mass testing. Instead there is disruption, harm and distress caused and two years on we have no robust randomised control trials for the benefits of mass testing of healthy school children.

The evidence we have heard is clear. Testing in schools must stop, especially in the absence of any sort of study on the impact it has on our children's physical and mental health. Evidence sessions such as this one are so important, to allow us to get a full picture before we make a decision and put our case to the Government.

Co-chair Graham Stringer said the "eye-watering sums" spent on testing would have been much better spent elsewhere.

We cannot continue to force such an invasive procedure and we have heard today of children as young as two being physically restrained by their parents, put in headlocks or vomiting after the tests. As I have said before, the evidence to impose these sorts of measures must be overwhelming and I'm not aware the evidence exists that testing healthy children is beneficial and will help stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Not to mention the eye-watering sums spent on testing which could have been so much better spent on redressing some of the damage already caused to child mental health. Surely the time has come to stop the mass testing of healthy children?

The MPs heard from several eminent specialists in public health and children's psychology, as well as from Mark Ward, a parent who spoke about the traumatic experiences of testing his toddler.

All argued against the mass testing of healthy children in schools, highlighting the insufficient scientific and clinical evidence and that far from being of any public health benefit, mass testing causes significant damage to children.

Dr. Angela E. Raffle, Honorary Senior Lecturer in University of Bristol Medical School, said there is "no sound evidence that testing children leads to reduction in serious cases of COVID-19".

SARS-CoV-2 testing of healthy school children needs to stop. The World Health Organisation cautions against mass symptomless testing because of high costs, lack of evidence on impact, and risk of diverting resources from more important activities. There is no sound evidence that testing children leads to reduction in serious cases of COVID-19.

The policy decision in England to introduce school testing appears to have been a political decision, to create the impression of safety, rather than investing in staffing and ventilation which would have made an impact. The tests being used have not been properly evaluated as self-tests or for use in children. Children are low transmitters compared with adults. The net effect of the school testing is harmful because of the trauma of repeated testing and the disruption to children's lives through repeated exclusion and isolation. Testing is important when done under medical supervision in order to guide decisions about the best way to treat a child who is ill, but the indiscriminate use of tests in children who are well is unjustified.

Dr. Allyson Pollock, Clinical Professor of Public Health at the University of Newcastle, added that constantly mass testing healthy children is "not only a traumatic experience but an appalling waste of time".

So many of the so-called public health measures applied over the last two years have been applied indiscriminately in blanket fashion and in the absence of evidence and sound evaluations. Mass testing healthy school children is one such unevidenced measure which has serious consequences. Mass testing is screening and in the U.K. the Government completely ignored the Wilson and Junger 1968 principles of screening and failed to seek the advice of the U.K. National Screening committee. Testing healthy children in the absence of good evidence of benefit and harms is highly unethical. Healthy children are being tested and isolated unnecessarily. Children are at extremely low risk of severe disease and many of them will be asymptomatic or only have mild symptoms. Testing has not been shown to prevent transmission. Mass testing healthy children is not only a traumatic experience, it is unethical and an appalling waste of time and money. Testing is something that should only be done if deemed clinically necessary, such as if a child is ill enough to need medical attention under medical supervision.

University of Nottingham Professor of Psychology Ellen Townsend told the MPs and Peers that the lack of evaluation of the psychological impact on children of constant testing was a "grave and unethical oversight".

It is unclear what mass testing healthy children is achieving from a Public Health perspective. No studies have been carried out to understand if there are any benefits and no evaluation has been done on the psychological impact of testing – this is a grave and unethical oversight. We must recognise that children are at minimal risk to others but the harms caused to children, the disruption from testing protocols in schools and the resulting absences, are completely disproportionate to the proclaimed benefits of indiscriminate mass testing. The president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health was quite correct when she said last year that testing in schools was causing unnecessary chaos.

Child and Adolescent Senior Clinical Psychologist Dr. Zenobia Storah described mass testing of healthy children as "harmful, invasive and unevidenced" and "nothing short of state-sponsored child abuse". She added:

I have been working with young people throughout the last two years and have seen a steep rise in mental health conditions as a result of measures like testing. These obsessive infection control measures are causing worrying levels of highly anxious behaviour. They maintain and amplify the fear messaging, further exacerbated when children are surrounded by adults, their parents or teachers, also constantly testing. It is utterly extraordinary for a society to treat their young in such an abusive way, to throw decades of understanding about normal child development out of the window without having considered the risk factors. One in six young people now meets the diagnostic criteria for at least one mental health disorder but there is still time to lessen and even reverse the long term psychological impact this is having on our children. Children and adolescents need to be prioritised and mass testing, like face coverings, must be consigned to the policy bin, once and for all. What is required immediately is a return to normality for all children and all school and extra-curricular environments.

By Will Jones

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