

## COVID-19: Reflections of Impact on Children

### Suraj Gupte\*

*Professor and Head (Emeritus), Postgraduate Department Paediatrics, MMC and General and Super-Specialty Hospitals, Khammam, Hyderabad, India*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Suraj Gupte, Professor and Head (Emeritus), Postgraduate Department Paediatrics, MMC and General and Super-Specialty Hospitals, Khammam, Hyderabad, India.

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The wretched COVID-19 pandemic continues to take the world by storm. The tragedy is that its resolution is nowhere in sight. As yet, there is no curative treatment. All therapies being used - hydroxychloroquine, antivirals, dexamethasone, plasma infusion - are at best supportive. Though work on developing vaccines is in progress in many countries, it is likely to take a considerable time in view of the various logistics involved [1]. Whether the vaccine, MMR, can provide protection against moderate-to-severe disease in adults remains to be categorically evaluated.

In the midst of various challenges, such self-contradictory speculations as “children are immune to COVID-19” and “COVID-19 causes deadly illness in children” are becoming viral. To the best of our information, the factual position, based on the available knowledge, about paediatric COVID-19 is as follows:

- Children are by no means immune to this viral infection.
- The apparent incidence in children is, however, relatively much less than in adults. One reason contributing to this observation is that many children, despite harbouring the virus, may remain symptom-free. The immunity produced by MMR vaccination in children is believed to contribute to the so-called “low incidence of COVID-19” in children [1].
- Children under 2 years are more prone to develop complications that may prove fatal in some.
- Older children who develop the malady usually have a mild disease, often with no symptoms.
- The risk of complications in children with the coronavirus infection is presumably high in those suffering from chronic immunological disorders, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, obesity, etc.
- Children too need to be protected against the novel coronavirus, virtually on the same lines as adults. The use of “mask for children < 2 years, is however, not recommended on account of the “risks” such as suffocation involved in this age group.

What is being neglected is that the measures taken by virtually all over the world to contain and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic are having persistent and far-reaching impacts on children’s lives. This should be seen in the background that families are facing heightened stress and financial insecurities under lockdowns and curfews. As a result:

- Children are missing out on life-saving vaccines.
- Children are not getting the much-needed “free meals” because of the suspension of concerned services.

- Many children are experiencing increasing threats to their safety and wellbeing because of the suspension of services involved in prevention of child abuse and neglect (CAN).
- As a result of limited access to the health facilities (that are by and large disrupted because of the preoccupation with the issues related to the pandemic), vulnerable children, even risk losing their lives.

According to the UNICEF, ongoing crisis could increase the number of children living in poor households by up to 106 million by the end of the 2020 as a result of strained health systems, household income loss, and disruptions to care-seeking and preventative interventions like vaccination [2].

Unfortunately, preoccupation of the policy-makers and executers with COVID-19 related issues has resulted in neglect of the child population in several ways. This situation needs remedial measures, especially those targeted at keeping children healthy [3].

Let's defeat covid-19 by protecting ourselves and protecting others. Meanwhile, let's not neglect our children. Yes, meaningful action is warranted today only. Tomorrow it may be late, rather too late.

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