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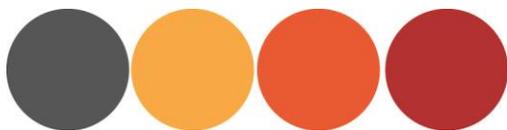
COVID-19 - General

[Update on COVID-19 variants](#)

Public Health Scotland has issued an update on the three COVID-19 variants which emerged during December 2020 in the UK. They are working with other public health agencies and academic partners to learn more about the variants and how they may be transmitted, as well as the effectiveness of the currently licensed vaccines against them. The updated confirms that three cases of the variant discovered in South Africa are in Scotland, and no cases of the Brazilian variant have been identified in Scotland.

[Evaluation of shielding programme](#)

Public Health Scotland has published a rapid evaluation of the COVID-19 Shielding Programme. It shows that the programme made a difference but there are lessons to be learnt for future support for people at risk. The evaluation found clear evidence that the shielding advice changed people's behaviour and that the shielding support addressed real need. It also found that the Shielding guidance was neither necessary nor sufficient to change behaviour in all instances. Among the issues for further consideration in future were opportunities for person-centred informed decision-making and how different risk factors combine to determine individual risk.



Additional Support Needs

[Call for commissioner for autism](#)

The BBC reports on a new campaign by three charities calling for a new commissioner to champion the rights of people with autism and learning disabilities. Enable Scotland, the National Autistic Society and Scottish Autism have joined forces to make the case for a commissioner, who they say would close the gap between what the law says and what happens on the ground in Scotland. They also believe a commissioner would be a powerful voice advocating on their behalf with public bodies who have a duty to provide equal access to services and support.

Child Protection

[Rise in reports of children living with domestic abuse](#)

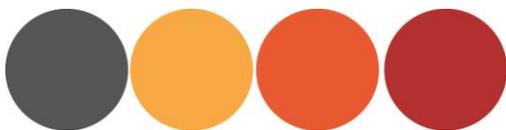
The NSPCC has raised concerns about increased reports of children living with domestic abuse in Scotland since the beginning of the pandemic. The BBC reports that referrals to agencies about children in abusive households have increased by more than 30 per cent since April 2020. The NSPCC suggested referrals were likely to rise further under the current lockdown.

[National guidance for death of a child or young person](#)

New guidance for reviewing the deaths of children and young people in Scotland has been developed by Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. The guidance sets out the process NHS boards and local authorities should follow when responding to, and reviewing, the death of a child or young person. It provides key steps to ensure consistency when reviewing the circumstances surrounding the death of a child or young person and identify key learning that will positively contribute to ways to prevent or reduce future, preventable deaths. The guidance has been developed with input from the National Hub expert advisory group that includes representation from service-based stakeholders, professional organisations, third sector organisations representing children and families and policy makers.

[New child sexual abuse strategy launched \(England\)](#)

A new national strategy has been launched by the UK Government to tackle child sexual abuse. The Home Office strategy sets out how the government will use new legislation and enhanced technology to stop offenders including investing in the UK's Child Abuse Image Database to identify and catch more offenders more quickly. There are also plans to review Sarah's Law to make it easier for parents to ask police if someone has a criminal record for child sexual offences.



Disability

[Survey to inform training for Child Disability Payment programme](#)

Social Security Scotland has launched a survey to inform the Child Disability Payment training programme. The survey, highlighted by the ALLIANCE, will seek to know more about disabled children and young people, or those with long term conditions, parents and unpaid carers and their experience of social security in Scotland.

Early Learning and Childcare

[ELC expansion to be reinstated](#)

The Scottish Government has written to all registered childcare providers regarding the legislation to reinstate the duty to make available 1140 hours of funded ELC to all eligible children. The legislation, which was laid before Parliament this week, places a duty on education authorities to make available 1140 hours of funded ELC from August 2021. The Scottish Government has published an [equality impact assessment](#), [business and regulatory impact assessment](#) and [children's rights and wellbeing impact assessment](#) on the legislative order.

[Early years workers share concerns about their safety \(England\)](#)

A survey by the Early Years Alliance, reported by Nursery World, suggests early years workers in England are experiencing high levels of COVID-19 cases with around half the workforce worried about their safety working in the sector. Nearly 1 in 10 (9 per cent) of nursery and pre-school staff and one in 12 (8 per cent) childminders have tested positive for Covid-19 since 1 December 2020, according to the survey.

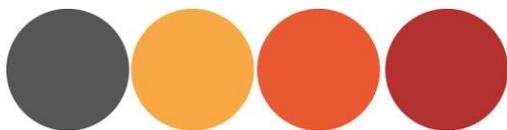
Justice

[CYCJ seeking new project workers](#)

Along with staff and its joint project Youth Justice Voices, the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice is recruiting for three Youth Justice Project Support Workers, to support the development of activities enabling young people to share their experiences of the Whole System Approach and to identify recommendations for change.

[Age of responsibility survey](#)

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice has created a survey for the Scottish Government to find out more about young people's views on the current Age of Criminal Responsibility, what they think this should actually be and why. The survey is for those aged 26 and under.



Looked After and Accommodated Children

[Fostering and adoption statistical bulletin](#)

The Care Inspectorate has published the latest Fostering and Adoption statistical bulletin for 2019-2020. Key points include:

- Fostering services continued to perform well and achieve positive evaluations, although comparing with the previous year there has been a slight decline in quality.
- The number of foster care households in Scotland continued to decrease.
- The overall number of children and young people in foster care has decreased.
- Fewer adoptive households were approved and the number of children legally adopted decreased.

[Digital divide facing care leavers during COVID-19](#)

CELCIS has published new research on the impact of digital inclusion and exclusion on care leavers during the pandemic. The report suggests those who struggle to access online spaces and use technology can face a range of barriers and disadvantages including loss of social connection, being prevented from studying or working, and an inability to access financial and health information and services. Recommendations include rolling out digital access for all care leavers by integrating this into the pathway planning and support processes in all local authorities, and upskilling workers to ensure they can better support young people to develop their digital skills.

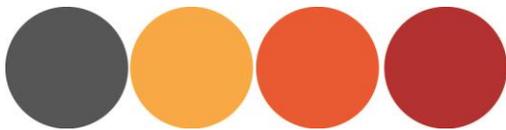
Other Health and Social Care

[ALLIANCE to host interview with Children's Commissioner](#)

The latest ALLIANCE live event will be held on Tuesday 23 February with Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner. Issues to be discussed include the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people and how children's rights can be realised, including children and young people with disabilities and long term conditions.

[Health inequalities monitoring report](#)

The ALLIANCE has highlighted the latest [annual update](#) on health inequalities from the Scottish Government. The data pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the gap in health outcomes between the most and least deprived areas for a variety of indicators, including: healthy life expectancy, premature mortality, mental wellbeing, baby birthweight, self-assessed health, limiting long-term conditions, and a range of morbidity and mortality indicators relating to alcohol, cancer, coronary heart disease and drug-use.



[Guidance on ethical issues related to pressure on services](#)

The British Association of Social Workers has published new guidance on ethical questions for social workers when services are not able to cope with demand due to COVID-19.

[Call for CMA investigation into children's social care \(England\)](#)

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is considering an investigation of the market for children in care placements, Community Care has reported. Josh MacAlister, who was appointed by the UK Government this month to head an independent review into children's social care confirmed he had written to the CMA, calling on it to carry out a study into the social care market. His letter said the CMA should consider such a review "as a matter of priority" in the light of concerns reported to him since his appointment regarding the insufficient supply of placements for children in care.

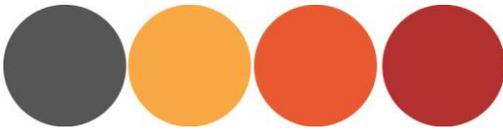
Other

[Scottish Government Budget 2021-22](#)

The Scottish Government has published its Budget for 2021-22. Headlines include:

- an increase of over £800m to the core Health and Sport budget, taking it to over £16bn
- total investment in health and social care integration to over £883m, including £34m for delivery of the Living Wage
- £145.3m (an increase of £50m) for action on alcohol and drugs
- investment exceeding 1.1bn on mental health services
- £567m for delivery of the early learning and childcare expansion.

The Scottish Government has also published its [2021-22 Public Sector Pay Policy](#), which includes a headline basic pay increase of 1% for public sector workers who earn less than £80,000 and a guaranteed cash underpin of £750 for public sector workers who earn £25,000 or less.



Disclaimer

This weekly bulletin is produced as an update on the key issues concerning children and young people.

Each item in the bulletin has a hyperlinked headline that will take the reader to the original source.

We collate items from our parliamentary and Scottish Government monitoring covering health and social care news from throughout the UK, and current research and policy development. We use a variety of sources for the bulletin, including alerts from [Newsdirect](#), [Community Care](#), [Children & Young People Now](#) and [ISD Scotland](#).

We aim to be representative rather than comprehensive, so we try to cover only the main Scottish stories, along with some stories from the rest of the UK. The purpose of the bulletin is to alert readers to items of interest. It should be noted that these items are the works of others and are neither authorised nor endorsed by the Care Inspectorate, with the exception of publications which are identified as Care Inspectorate publications.

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