

# Covid and Childcare Research Study: A summary of our research findings for the parents who took part



The Covid and Childcare Research Study looked at how the Covid pandemic affected families' use of childcare for 0–4-year-olds in England and how access to childcare services could be improved. To help us understand families' experiences, we spoke to parents about how Covid affected their work and childcare arrangements. We also interviewed childcare staff, and the teams in local authorities that are responsible for overseeing childcare in their local areas, and analysed national data on the use of childcare. Now that the study is complete, we'd like to share our key findings with you.

## How Covid affected the use of childcare

- Most children missed out on time in childcare because of the pandemic.
- During 2020, there was a large drop in the number of children using childcare.
- By autumn 2021, families were still using less childcare than expected.
- Overall, children from less affluent families, ethnic minority backgrounds and those with special educational needs were the most likely to miss out on childcare services because of the pandemic.

## How Covid affected childcare services

- Nurseries and childminders changed how they ran their services. They limited parents coming onto their premises, and put staff and children in bubbles. Some also kept in touch with children and parents over Zoom or by phone, and some sent parents resources or information about how to help children continue to learn and develop at home.
- Nurseries and childminders had to make decisions about whether to stay open or close. Parents found it frustrating when they closed. Some parents were surprised that the rules for schools did not apply to childcare.

## How disruptions in childcare arrangements affected families

### Parents

Parents' experiences varied, but they tended to report that:

- Having limited/no access to childcare was difficult, particularly for lone parents, those with school-age children and those with children with additional needs.
- Parents saw benefits from spending time with children but also felt the strain of parenting without childcare. Mothers especially felt the strain and fathers especially felt the benefits.
- Because childcare was closed, some families had to take time off work or reduce hours.
- Parents felt it was unfair they had to pay childcare when it wasn't available. They also felt they should have been able to use the 'free' hours that they had missed to catch up when their setting was open again.

### Children

When we spoke to parents and people providing childcare services, they were sometimes worried about the effects on children's development. They were concerned about:

- Children's speech and language development.
- Children's social and mental health needs, as they missed out on chances to socialise.
- Children's physical development, as they tended to spend less time outdoors and being active.

## How local authorities supported families during the pandemic

Local authorities helped match parents with childcare services where parents needed this. They also provided financial support to people providing childcare which was important in helping them to stay open.

## Current challenges for childcare services

- 1) **Finances:** some childcare services took on debt or used reserves and are now operating with less income compared to before the pandemic.
- 2) **Demand:** some childcare services are still seeing fewer families take places, or families taking fewer hours than before the pandemic.
- 3) **Staffing:** some childcare services are experiencing difficulties recruiting staff.

## Study recommendations

The pandemic showed how important childcare is in helping children's development as well as supporting family wellbeing and parents' work. To make sure that all children can access and benefit from childcare services, our study concluded that:

1. **The government needs to increase the funding it gives to support childcare services.**
2. **Local authorities need to be given more power and funding to ensure that local childcare meets the needs of children and their parents.**
3. **More support is needed to childcare providers, so that they can do more to help the children who need extra help.**

To find out more about the study and to read the full report, visit Coram Family and Childcare [here](#).