



Children's Commissioner for Jersey
Promoting and Protecting Children's Rights

News Release

17 March 2020

**Statement from Jersey's Commissioner for Children and Young People,
Deborah McMillan, on the impact of the coronavirus**

The current outbreak of COVID-19 is providing very real challenges for the Island's children and young people, as well as for their families and caregivers. I am currently seeking reassurance from the Government that these challenges are being identified in a timely manner.

I will give details of that in moment. First, however, I would like to emphasise that there are certain measures that everyone in the Island can adopt in order to lessen the impact on our children and young people.

Children feeling unnecessary anxiety about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic can happen easily and by accident. An overheard conversation or snippets from media reporting can be very alarming for young children, in particular. It is therefore essential that we all take the time to provide them with appropriate context and reassurance.

The first priority, then, for parents and caregivers is to stay well-informed about coronavirus from official sources, and to avoid fueling speculation on social media and other platforms.

Secondly, we must remember that many younger members of our community are looking to the adults to provide clear information that is both appropriate and easily understood.

If we fail to do this properly, then the alternative sources of (often unsubstantiated and unfiltered) discussion on social media and elsewhere will take precedence. And this can lead to considerable anxiety.

There are resources on our website, and also on our Twitter feed, that have been specifically developed to help young people (children, in particular) to put the rapidly-evolving news

about coronavirus into a manageable and relatable context. Please use them (see notes to editors).

In more specific terms, I am seeking reassurance from the Government that the rights of our children and young people are being upheld in a number of currently vulnerable areas.

Jersey's community is admirably strong, and new practical measures and workarounds are being put in place every day. This is fantastic and heartening to see. However, it is also important that we continue to set out areas of concern and vulnerability in black and white.

To that end, these are some of the areas which we are currently discussing with Government.

Young Islanders pursuing their education in the UK and further afield may not be able to return or, in some cases, have contact with their families. The same thing applies to those children and young people who have been placed in care in the UK and who may not be able to see their families or siblings.

Children and young people on child protection, children in need or with early help plans are also especially vulnerable at this time, when there is an increasingly real prospect of prolonged school closures. For these children, attending school and youth centres may well be an important part of their care planning, as well as a necessary element of structure in their lives.

An increasing number of families in Jersey are struggling to manage financially. There is particular concern around cases in which parents and carers on zero-hour contracts are being laid off, with no access to public funds because of a lack of residential qualifications.

Children and young people have the right to an education. We must make certain that their rights are not being compromised, nor their futures jeopardised, if they are not able to attend public examinations or if they miss the critical few weeks of preparation before exams.

The right to good-quality healthcare is obviously key at this particular time. I would be concerned that those who cannot afford to pay to see a doctor may be afraid to identify with symptoms of COVID-19. Many of those families are not currently registered with a GP and will therefore not be automatically receiving extra support and information from local surgeries.

Under the current law, children under the age of 12 are protected from unregistered childcare. Any relaxation of this legislation in order to tackle the inevitable practical difficulties that will arise during this difficult time must not compromise children's safety and protection.

Food poverty is, for some families in this Island, a real and frightening issue. I will be seeking reassurance that families relying on foodbanks will be able to access food as voluntary groups begin to stop providing services.

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Notes to Editors

1. Resources

Our website has a dedicated area for coronavirus information resources (in English, Portuguese and Polish) that have been written specifically for young children.

You can find them here

<https://www.childcomjersey.org.je/publications/media-and-announcements/coronavirus-information/>

We will also continue to tweet child-friendly information videos and links, so keep checking our channel to stay up to date @OCCJersey