

SESSION ON COVID TESTING OF CHILDREN

Pandemic Response and Recovery

Monday 31 January 2022, 16.00

MINUTES

In Attendance: Rt Hon Esther McVey MP (Chair), Graham Stringer MP, Philip Davies MP, Miriam Cates MP, Sammy Wilson MP, Baroness Foster of Oxtou.

Guest speakers: Dr Angela Raffle, Dr Allyson Pollock, Dr Zenobia Storah, Professor Ellen Townsend, Mark Ward.

Non-voting attendees: Jemma Moran (Secretariat), Rachel Marcus (Secretariat).

Apologies: Emma Lewell-Buck MP, the Earl of Leicester, Dawn Butler MP, Henry Smith MP, Sir Charles Walker MP, Sir Graham Brady MP, Chris Green MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Ian Paisley MP, Baroness Morrissey, Baroness Fox of Buckley, Lord Moylan, Baroness Noakes, Lord Robathan, Paul Girvan MP, David Warburton MP, Lord Moonie.

1. The Chair welcomed the APPG members to the second session to discuss mass testing of children in schools and nurseries.
2. The Chair introduced the five speakers and the Group heard evidence from each:
 - **Mark Ward**, a parent who spoke about the challenge of repeatedly having to test his child, the financial pressure it puts on his family, taking time off work is not an option, the traumatic experiences of testing his toddler, having to restrain her and avoid injury such as nose bleeds, her harrowing conditioned response to testing, including screaming before and vomiting after.
 - **Dr Angela E Raffle, Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of Bristol Medical School Department of Population Health Sciences**, began by saying she had spent over 35 years in the field of screening and spoke about the principles of screening, how they were not followed in mass coronavirus testing, the importance of a well managed programme, pointing out the government did not consult the UK National Screening Committee before introducing a mass testing policy. Dr Raffle also spoke about the harms all tests do and in this case the possible long term harms, the financial costs for no benefit, diverting resources away from better public health measures and historic context as to how in the UK screening is not a public health measure favoured.
 - **Dr Allyson Pollock, Clinical Professor of Public Health at the University of Newcastle** made the points that there is no evidence screening/testing children stops transmission or infection, children are least at risk and usually asymptomatic or mild so less at risk of transmitting, most infection in children will be from other causes so it's unnecessary testing, that these were inappropriate tests and applying public health measures indiscriminately as blanket measures is not public health. Dr Pollock added that all tests should be carefully trialled and evaluated before rolling out, which this was not and that these are healthy children and so it is unethical not helped by the over-interpretation of the guidance by schools and nurseries. Dr Pollock ended by

advocating a return to local public health policy.

- **Dr Zenobia Storah, Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychologist**, spoke about the psychological harms children are suffering with testing and by being made to shoulder a disproportionate burden with the introduction of NPIs, including testing, in other words new practices, without any evaluation or risk assessment to understand the long term harms, it was already known that schoolchildren were a mentally vulnerable population yet further anxiety was added to their environment and saw an exacerbation of mental health disorders, OCD, social anxiety, self harming and obsession with infection control and highlighting how government messaging has deliberately and consistently placed responsibility for others' safety on the shoulders of the young, instilling routine medical self testing of children is unethical.
- **Professor Ellen Townsend, Professor of Psychology at the University of Nottingham** started by saying that she leads the self harm and suicide prevention unit, echoed Dr Storah's words, adding she has seen the size of the vulnerable group grow and systematic review evidence that at least 8/10 young people now have a significant, psychological behavioural problem as a result of the mandated restrictions. Professor Townsend described mass testing as lockdown by stealth and closing down the lives of young people has a significant psychological impact as Mark's story is not uncommon with parents emailing her with similar stories. She emphasised the lack of evaluation of the psychological harms and impact of continued testing and such a programme would normally have been shut down given the harms already known, calling on children to be put first as per the UN convention on the rights of the child S3.1.

3. All four experts argued against mass testing of healthy children.

4. The Chair invited Members to ask questions. Members were able to probe the experts further on particular points of concern following examination of the evidence.

5. The Chair thanked all the Members who attended and the speakers, confirmed the date of the next meeting, Monday 28 February 2022 at 4pm and brought the meeting to a close.