



Invisible children: the hidden impacts of the pandemic on child health.

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Overview

- Background
- Children's Emergency Department (A&E) attendances
- Specialist referrals for children's brain tumours
- Wider impact on children's health and wellbeing
- Questions



I did none of this on my own....



- Lancaster Medical School: Drs Rhiannon Edge and Tom Keegan
- Royal Manchester Children's Hospital: Drs Rachel Jenner and Natalie Francis, and Emily Broughton
- Royal Oldham Hospital: Dr Jim Butler
- Yale New Haven Children's Hospital: Drs Marc Auerbach and Mark X. Cicero, and Erika Setzer
- Cambridge University Hospital: Dr Ib Jalloh

My other “day job”



September 2019



March 6th 2020



March 13th 2020



June 12th 2020

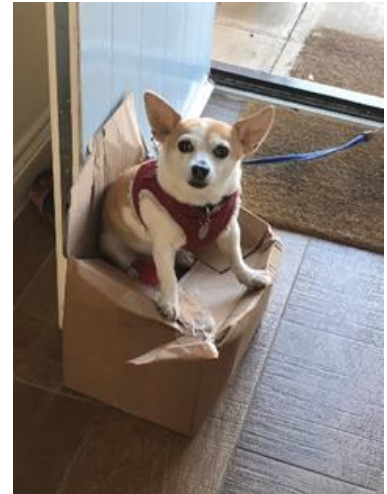
Background

- we were due a big one... (H1N1 influenza of 1918/19 infected 1/3 of the global population and came in three waves...)
- end January 2020 – 1st cases of “COVID-19” in UK
- early March 2020 – 1st UK death
- Wednesday March 11th 2020 – pandemic declared
- Monday March 23rd 2020 – UK (and Connecticut) start “lockdown”
- Tuesday March 31st 2020 – I came out of domestic “quarantine” and wondered where all the children had gone...

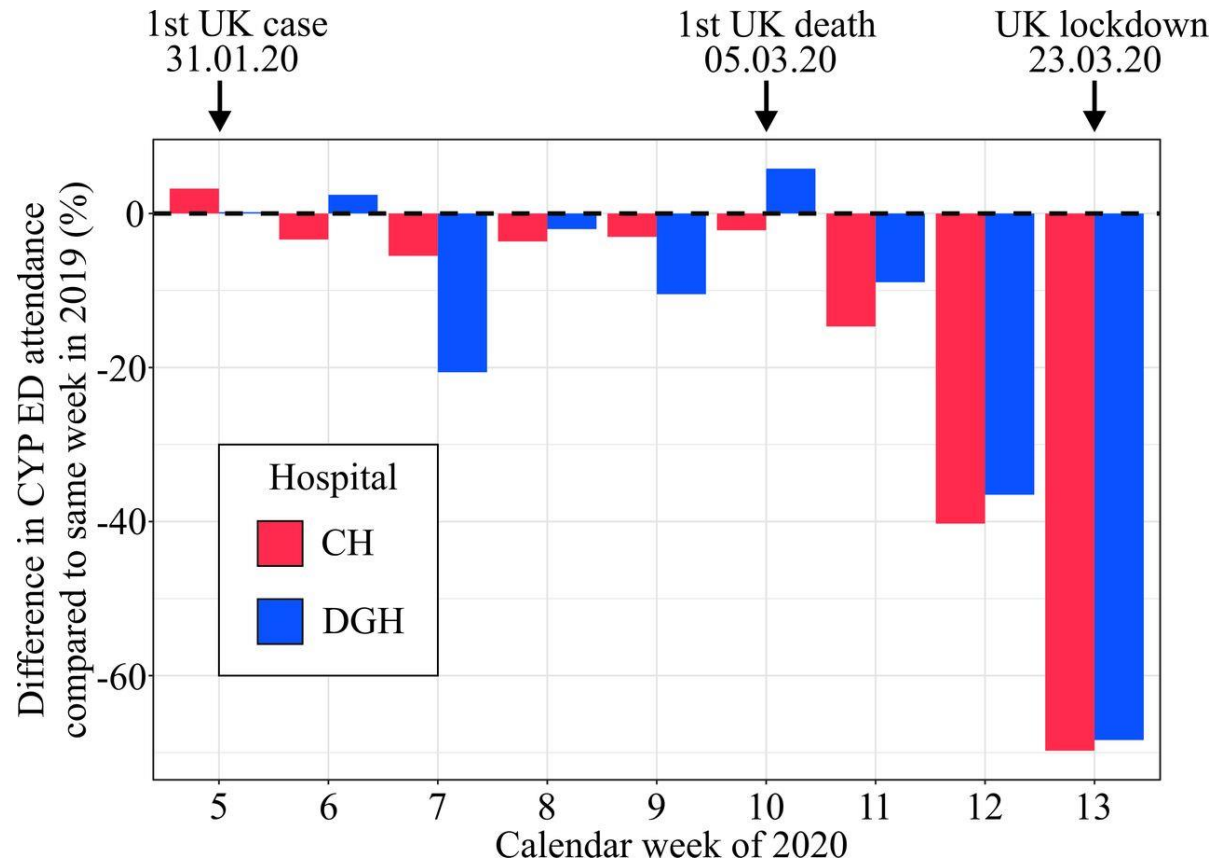


Impact of the pandemic on children

- COVID-19 (direct impact)
 - fortunately only a small number of children and young people have become seriously ill with COVID-19 and a very small number have died
- indirect impacts
 - health (non-COVID)
 - wellbeing
 - education
 - social care
 - inequalities



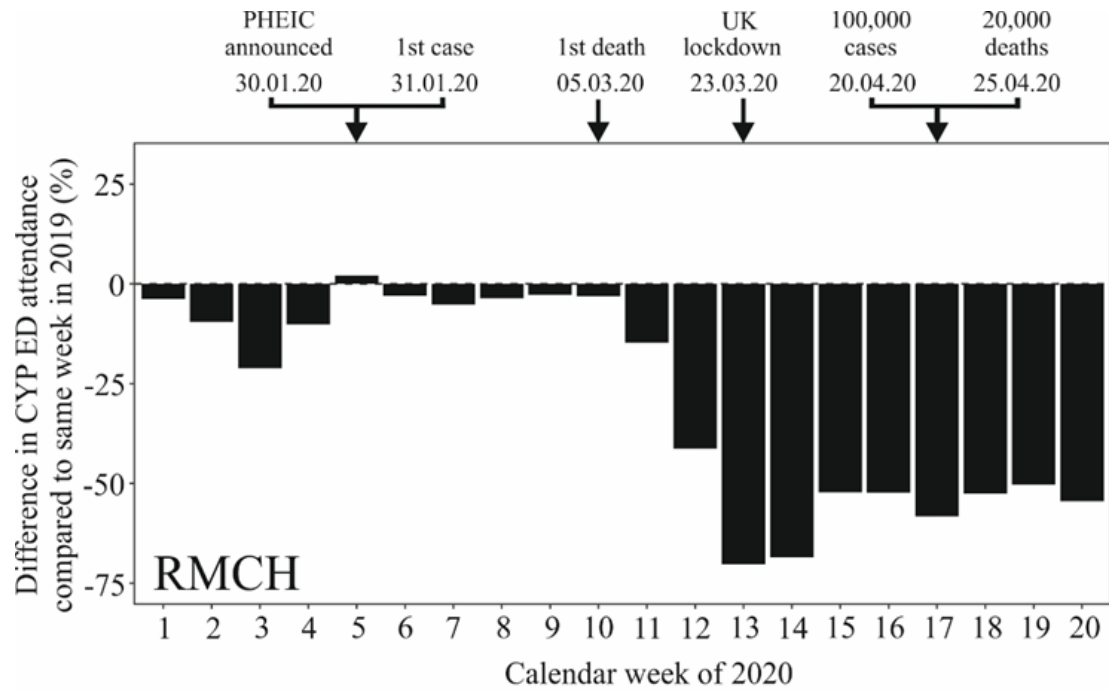
Paediatric Emergency Department (A&E) attendances in the first wave



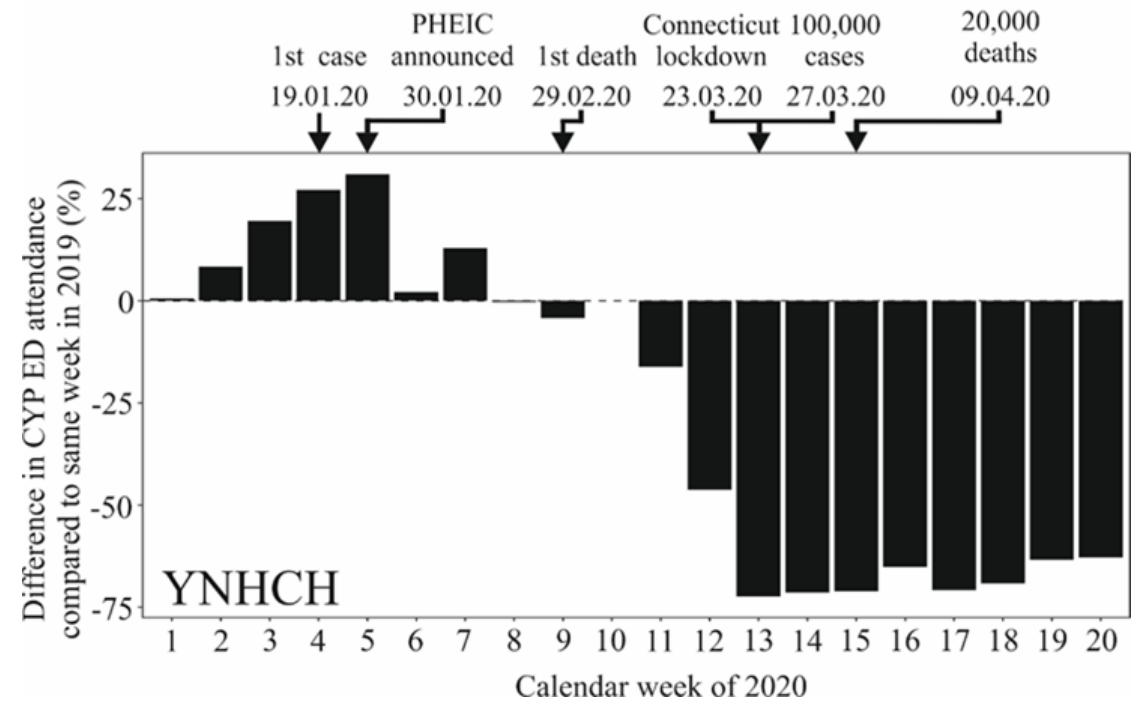
Weekly comparison of children and young people (CYP; <16 years of age at presentation), attending the Paediatric Emergency Departments (PEDs) at the district general hospital (DGH) and children's hospital (CH), 2019 versus 2020.

Published April 2020 in *Archives of Disease in Childhood*

Comparison between UK and US



Weekly PED attendances (<16 years old) at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital (UK) from weeks 1-20 of 2020 compared to the same weeks in 2019.



Weekly PED attendances (< 16 years old) at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital (US) from weeks 1-20 of 2020 compared to the same weeks in 2019.

But why?

Lots of contributing factors for the decrease in attendances, e.g.

- decrease in other viral illnesses due to handwashing, distancing, etc.
- fear of the virus and hospitals
- perception that hospitals were only for people with COVID-19
- decrease in medically un-necessary attendances

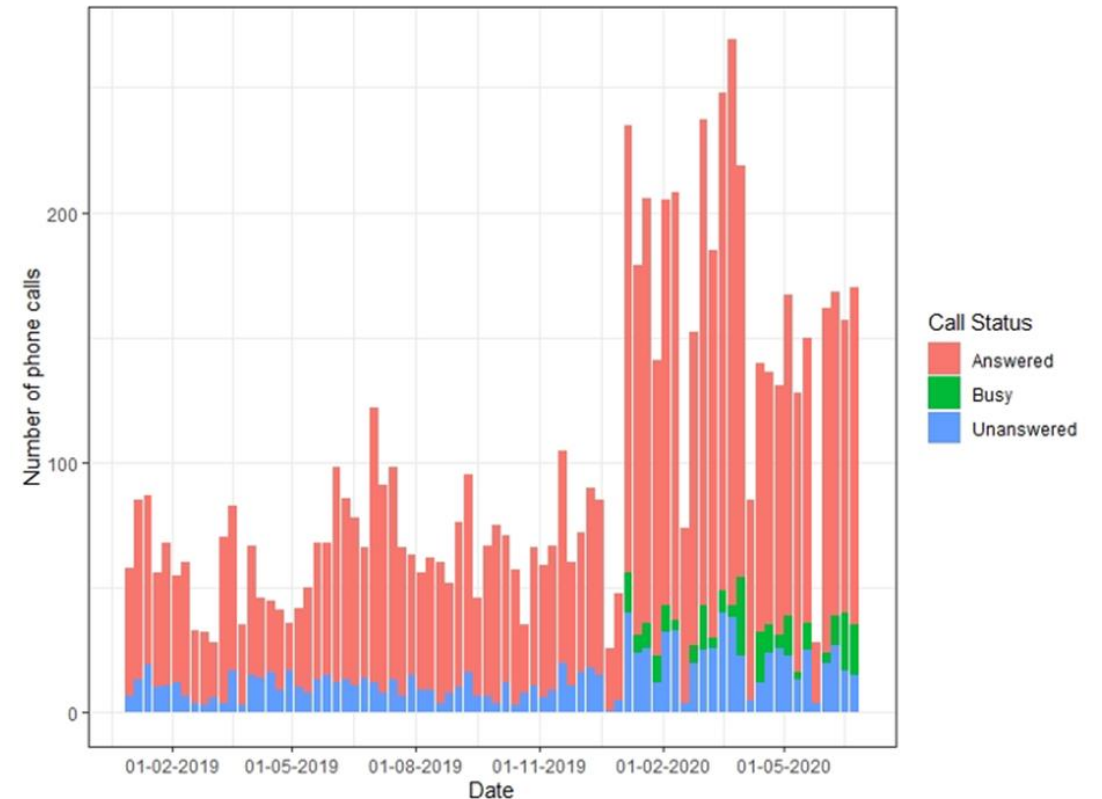
...leading to concern that some children

- came to the hospital later than usual e.g. new brain tumours
- were invisible, so at higher risk of e.g. abuse

Patterns of referrals to specialist neurosurgery

- Cambridge children's neurosurgical service
- urgent referrals ↓ 8% in the first half of 2020 compared to the average for Jan-June 2016-2019
- new brain and spinal tumour referrals down compared to average and head injuries up

Published August 2020 in *Child's Nervous System*



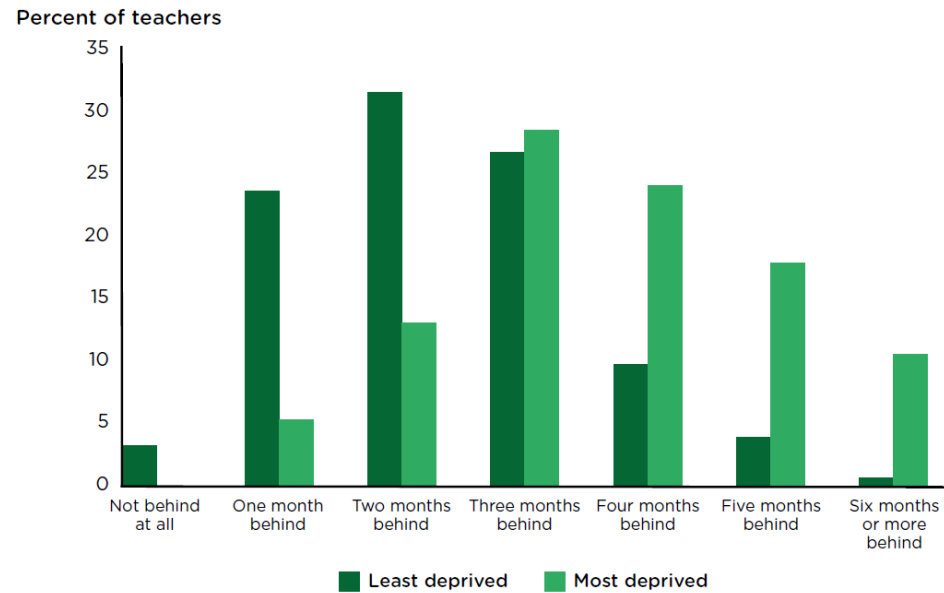
Number of calls made to the specialist nurse phone, by week and call status, January 2019 – June 2020.

Exciting new project alert!

- Action Medical Research grant – starting soon
- *“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on diagnosis and management of new brain tumours in children and young people (aged <16 years old) in the UK.”*
- team led by Cambridge and Lancaster, also including Manchester and Nottingham
- brain surgeons, children’s cancer doctors, a public health doctor (me 😊), a social scientist, children/young people, parents/carers, and brain tumour charities

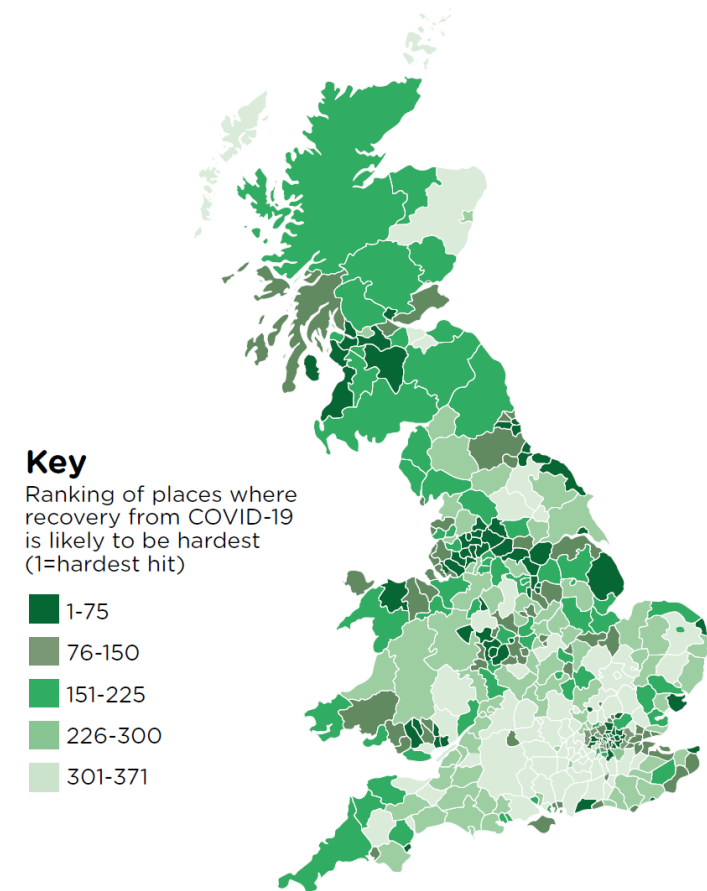
Widening inequalities during the pandemic

Figure 10. Percent of teachers reporting loss of learning in the least and most deprived schools, England, September 2020



Both taken from “Build back fairer: the COVID-19 Marmot review.”

Figure 23. Ranking of Local Authorities in Great Britain where employment recovery from COVID-19 is likely to be hardest, July 2020



Conclusion

- children and young people (< 16 years old) make up a small number of serious infections and death due to COVID-19 (direct effects)
- BUT they may be more susceptible to indirect effects (and they are pretty much invisible/forgotten)
- hospital (and school etc.) attendance offers an opportunity for lots of other things e.g. identifying children at risk of abuse
- implications for ongoing periods of lockdown in current pandemic

Questions?



Where does Father Christmas go for the rest of the year?