



14 January 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Throughout the pandemic we have taken forward a number of actions to ensure mental health and well-being support continues to be available. This includes positioning NHS mental health services as essential services and investing in additional support for low level mental health issues. The Welsh Government has also been working with partners to monitor closely the available data and evidence on rates of suicide to identify whether any further action is needed. Whilst the most recent ONS data demonstrated a lower rate of suicide in 2020 compared to 2019 (most likely driven by a decrease in male suicide at the start of the pandemic and delays in death registrations), there are continued concerns about the longer term possible impact, particularly for children and young people, as the pandemic continues.

To ensure we are doing all that we can to identify those young people at risk of suicide, and to strengthen preventative measures, the Welsh Government commissioned the Child Death Review Programme in Public Health Wales to undertake a review of possible suicides in children and young people aged 8-17 years, between 1st January and 30th November 2021.

The key themes in the review identified opportunities for preventative activity, and indicate where more focused support should be considered. The particular vulnerabilities identified are:

- Looked after children
- Children on the Child Protection Register
- Those with a history of self harm
- Those in a family known to social services
- Those previously bereaved or directly impacted by a suicide
- Those living in more disadvantaged or under-served communities.

The settings identified by the review for focussed intervention include the school and sports clubs attended by the child or young person who has died.



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The review also recommended that a package of support is made available to include support for children and young people to know how and when to seek help. Whilst we have undertaken additional work to promote these resources both prior and during the Christmas period at a national level, we would be grateful for your help in disseminating this information via your local networks generally, but also targeted to those key groups included above. **This information is included in Annex 1.**

The potential impacts of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children and young people are wide ranging. They include concerns about families and loved ones, family bereavements due to Covid-19, isolation from friends and uncertainty about education and employment. However, we are also concerned about the impact of the loss of protective factors during the pandemic, including access to children's services, schools, health services and mental health support. **We are therefore recommending increased vigilance across the system to identify and provide additional support for those young people at risk of suicide, and to ensure a consistent, sensitive and multi-agency response to unexpected deaths in childhood, in line with PRUDiC.**

Whilst we recognise that many services are under significant pressure, it is essential that local safeguarding arrangements for children and young people remain robust during this challenging period. Therefore, I would be grateful if you could share the information contained in this letter within your local networks, highlighting the need for increased vigilance at this time.

Please direct any queries regarding this communication to:
MentalHealthandVulnerableGroups@gov.wales

Yours sincerely,



Tracey Breheny
Deputy Director Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Vulnerable Groups

Circulating to:

Health Boards (CAMHS, Eating Disorder, psychological therapies, Suicide Regional Coordinators)

All Wales AD Children's Social Services

All Wales Safeguarding leads

Directors of Education

Whole System Approach Coordinators and the CAMHS in reach practitioners

Local Authority Safeguarding Education leads

Youth Justice Teams

Traumatic Stress Wales

Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards

Annex 1

[Suicide and self-harm guidance launched to support schools | GOV.WALES](#)

[Repository – Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Young person's mental health toolkit - Low mood](#)