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Chief Executives of Local Authorities  
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Chairs of Child Protection Committees  
Chief Social Work Officers  
Child Health Commissioners  
Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland  
Care Inspectorate  
Education Scotland  
Health Improvement Scotland  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

Copy to: Key professional groups

31 March 2020

Dear Colleague

## **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) SUPPLEMENTARY NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION GUIDANCE**

We write at a time of great challenge, when leaders, managers and practitioners across children's services are dealing with unprecedented circumstances as a result of Covid-19. We want to thank you for your work in preparing and responding to the pandemic and very much value your leadership at this exceptional time.

We are likely to see a rise in child protection concerns and child protection caseloads due to the impacts of the pandemic on families and wider society. New stresses arising from Early Learning and Childcare, school and business closures, family confinement and isolation alongside physical and psychological health impacts, could be a trigger for abuse and neglect. High stress home environments will increase the likelihood of domestic abuse. We must also be alert to signs that individuals or groups are using the pandemic as an opportunity for criminal or sexual exploitation of children. This is occurring at a time when children will be less visible to a range of professionals who are normally engaged with them and when services and practitioners working with children are under acute pressure.

**The rights of children do not alter during this pandemic, and nor do professional responsibilities in relation to child protection. We know that leaders responsible for the protection of children locally, have already made and continue to make, complex decisions about managing risk within the dynamic context of their evolving**

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**responses. The protection of children must continue to be prioritised during this period.**

We attach Covid-19 guidance which supplements the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 and is intended to support the leadership already being demonstrated in this area. It has been developed in response to the issues identified by local partnerships and is provided for Chief Officers, professional leaders in children's services and Child Protection Committees, who should ensure it is taken account of within their partnerships.

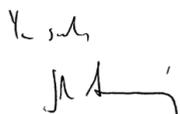
The guidance reflects that child protection is part of a continuum of collaborative responsibilities upon agencies working with children. This critical area continues to require good professional judgement, based on assessment and evidence, informed by the perspectives of the team around the child, including the child and family. The guidance provides advice about streamlining current processes to take account of current challenges without compromising actions to protect children, and notes the critical role of Chief Officers in demonstrating collective leadership in the current situation.

This guidance will be published on the Scottish Government website at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-supplementary-national-child-protection-guidance>. It will be kept under review and updated as necessary as the pandemic develops in discussion with stakeholders. We would welcome continued dialogue with you, particularly in relation to further issues that may emerge, to assist us identify where additional actions or support may be needed. Please get in touch by email at [Child\\_Protection@gov.scot](mailto:Child_Protection@gov.scot)

We know that a range of innovative practice is already emerging across local areas and professional networks are encouraged to share their developing approaches. Examples of local Covid-19 operational guidance are available on the Social Work Scotland website at <https://socialworkscotland.org/latest-updates-on-covid-19/> and the Covid-19 protection and safeguarding plans of a number of areas are also accessible to Directors of Education and Children's Services through the ADES website. We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge at the current time, and would like to reiterate that support is on offer from the Scottish Government and national agencies to local areas if needed.

Lastly, you will be aware that the Scottish Government had planned to launch a public consultation on updated National Child Protection Guidance next month. This is clearly now not possible, but we are still considering publishing the new draft guidance in coming weeks, in order to share thinking about best practice, and as a prelude to subsequent consultation.

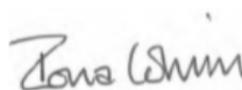
These are unprecedented times, but good professional judgement and good practice will help keep Scotland's children safe.



**JOHN SWINNEY**



**Catherine Calderwood**  
Chief Medical Officer



**Iona Colvin**  
Chief Social Work Adviser



**Fiona McQueen**  
Chief Nursing Office

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