

Are We Ready for the Day After?

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The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic significantly impacted health worldwide. The reorganization of health care, especially the setup of new circuits depending on respiratory symptoms, has led to the prioritization of urgent care against preventive medicine.¹

The scientific production also reflects the impact of the pandemic. The number of articles about SARS-CoV-2 published in PubMed between 2021 and 2022 (n = 24 583) vastly surpassed the number of articles about colon cancer ever published (n = 15 787) from 1831 to 2022. The same occurs when using the Portuguese national publications index (IndexRMP) for the same topics and timeframe: 541 vs 294.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 also shifted the interpersonal relationships, lifestyle, and economic paradigm. Children and young people were not spared. We know that environment strongly influences the early years of life - from fetal life until the end of childhood, the brain is sensitive to every stimulus. Therefore, children's experiences and traumas have an impact on their psychomotor, emotional, and social development and may have long-term repercussions.

Confinement periods during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) led to unexpected changes in all aspects of children's lives, particularly in modifying dietary patterns, physical activity, and mental health, as demonstrated by one of the articles on this issue.² Another article points out that the pandemic has also increased the incidence of overweight in children compared to the pre-pandemic period and at least one year after the confinement.³ These consequences of the pandemic should be a focus of attention in this period, given the comorbidities and pathologies associated with obesity and overweight, which may affect the future of today's young people.

Finally, we highlight another article published in this issue, in which the authors have reported that child health surveillance, disease prevention, and vaccination were also affected by COVID-19. Unfortunately, during the pandemic and until 2021, there was a global decrease in appointments at the national level. The

number of patients with chronic pathologies that failed to vigilance in primary health care was high. The number of pediatrician appointments, as recommended by the national child and youth health program, also decreased.⁴ The postponement or even cancellation of consultations might have contributed to the delay in vaccination of many children, and the pre-pandemics coverage values still need to be reached.

The provision of health care in Portugal, especially in the primary health care setting, needs more to recover from the pandemic.

What repercussions can we see in the coming years for the health of children and adolescents? We must start a profound reflection at this stage to prepare for the next few years. It is essential to draw attention to the reduction of human resources in the outpatient clinic that compromises preventive medicine and increases emergency episodes. Did the confinement decrease the immunity of children and adults to common infectious diseases?

Given the unambiguous conditions of the planet, with notable climate change and a consequent increase in the number of zoonotic infections, the risk of new COVID-19-like pandemics is real and growing. Are we properly prepared?

Keywords: Adolescent; Child; COVID-19/complications; Health Impact Assessment; Pandemics; Portugal; Public Health Surveillance

Author Contributions

CA and TC participated in the study conception or design. CA and TC participated in acquisition of data. CA and TC participated in the analysis or interpretation of data. CA and TC participated in the drafting of the manuscript. CA participated in the critical revision of the manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript and are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare that there were no conflicts of interest in drafting this paper.

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