

# The Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre (WCEC)

November 2021

## Briefing

### Background

The [Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre](#) was established by the Welsh Government in March 2021 to provide analysis of crucial scientific evidence to help tackle some of the new health and social care challenges created by the pandemic.

The WCEC, which is part of Health and Care Research Wales, aims to provide around 30-40 reviews per year answering some of the priority questions for policy and practice in Wales. It works by rapidly reviewing the best available evidence on a certain topic. With research ongoing and new data emerging all the time, it is however important to note that implications reported by the WCEC could change as more research becomes available.

The approach enables rapid access to key international research findings and fast and focused research studies to be undertaken at a Wales level to guide decision-making by ministers, as well as leaders in the NHS and social care.

The WCEC has **15 reviews completed and 9 ongoing** in the following broad areas: addressing the backlog of care; infection surveillance, control and treatment; children, young people and education; mental health implications; reducing inequalities; social care; long covid; vaccine uptake and behavioural considerations.

[The full work programme including published reviews to date can be found here on the Health and Care Research Wales website.](#)

The WCEC is led by GP and Cardiff University academic, Professor Adrian Edwards whose core team works closely with collaborating partners such as Health Technology Wales, Wales Centre for Evidence-Based Care, Specialist Unit for Review Evidence centre, SAIL Databank, Bangor Institute for Health & Medical Research/ Health and Care Economics Cymru, and the Public Health Wales Evidence Observatory.

A fortnightly series of internal briefings from the WCEC is ongoing and the first quarterly external symposium, focussing on education, children and young people, is taking place on 7th December 2021.

## Evidence and impact on decision-making

The five published reviews outlined below demonstrate how decision-making has been guided by timely and high-quality evidence review, with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of people in Wales. The WCEC continues to respond quickly to urgent requests and is currently collating additional research priorities received from stakeholders.

### 1. Face coverings

- The Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre's rapid review on the effectiveness of face coverings was used in July 2021 to inform Wales' [move to Alert Level 0](#), and how face coverings, along with hand hygiene, social distancing and ventilation remain key elements of the strategy to control the impact of COVID-19.
- This work resulted in a continuing collaboration with UKHSA colleagues also conducting rapid review work.

### 2. Mental health in health and social care workers

- Evidence suggests there has been a substantial adverse impact on the mental health of health and social care workers. [Moral injury](#) is an additional risk.
- Female staff, people with pre-existing or prior mental health disorder and having worries about COVID-19 transmission/PPE may require most support.
- The adverse impact on mental health is likely to be significant enough to warrant availability of support to staff being a priority.

### 3. Infection control measures in schools

- The evidence showed that risk of transmission in primary school and daycare settings is low, when infection control and prevention measures are adhered to.
- The evidence for transmission risk within secondary schools was more variable. Infection control strategies that incorporate a multi-component approach and in line with the local pandemic context should be considered.
- This review was conducted in a short time frame to inform the Welsh Government '[Local COVID-19 Infection Control Decision Framework](#)'.

### 4. Disinfection methods (including ozone machines) in schools

- There was no direct evidence for the effectiveness and safety of using ozone machines to deactivate SARS-CoV-2 in real-world educational settings. There was evidence for the risk of harm from either ozone or secondary pollutants
- Other measures, such as improvements to ventilation, are more effective.
- This review was conducted in a short time-frame and [informed the decision](#) not to use ozone machines.

## 5. Covid-19 infection and vaccination in pregnant women

- There is concern in Wales that COVID-19 vaccine uptake in pregnant women is low, contributing to increased hospital admissions in this population group.
- Healthcare professionals should advise those who are pregnant to have the vaccine, particularly if they are part of an at-risk group.
- A [rapid review of guidance](#) with an associated infographic was produced to summarise evidence to inform messaging aimed at pregnant women and health professionals.

Health and Care Research Wales which hosts the WCEC is the delivery arm and external brand of the Welsh Government's Health and Social Services Research & Development Division. Health and Care Research Wales works in partnership with the NHS, universities, local government, other research funders, patients and the public to fund, support and increase research that can transform lives, promote economic growth and advance science. The Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre is part of a wider programme of work led by Health and Care Research Wales with partners in the other nations of the UK to use research to tackle the pandemic.

**For more information visit:  
Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre.**