



British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Black and minority ethnic (BAME) children more at risk from COVID-19 as Schools Reopen

As the country returns to a new normal past the first super surge of COVID-19, it is imperative that we take heed to new risks that school reopening poses to children and adults from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

In the Downing press briefing on 17 June, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, described how >600,000 children in England and Wales had returned to school. There is an assumption that children appear not to have a substantial risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes themselves. In fact less than 1% of COVID-19 (Data from King's College London 12 out of 2288) patients were children. Parents and politicians are therefore likely to take comfort from this fact. It is argued that on the balance of probabilities, it is far more justifiable to encourage children to attend school. The data supports this assumption but there is an exception. One that affects children from BAME backgrounds. Between 71-80% of children with COVID-19 from studies in London (KCHL) and Paris were from BAME backgrounds.

On May 23rd Lancet published data describing 8 children who presented with a new syndrome, now called "Multisystem inflammatory syndrome " (MIS) temporally associated with COVID-19. In a rapid review published in *The Physician*, Prof Bhupinder Sandhu OBE, Paediatric Gastroenterologist at Bristol Children's Hospital highlights this risk and urges for urgent public awareness that children from BAME background are at greater risk from COVID-19. In the Italian study, 21% of children were asymptomatic carriers. Hence, unknowingly they would transmit the SARS-Cov-2 virus to other children and adults. *Children are more likely to have mild or no symptoms so it would be virtually impossible to detect the infection. This has significant risks for their peers and teachers or staff from BAME backgrounds.*

In a rapid review published in [The Physician](#), Prof Bhupinder Sandhu OBE, Paediatric Gastroenterologist at Bristol Children's Hospital highlights this risk and urges for urgent public awareness that children from BAME background are at greater risk from COVID-19. In the Italian study, 21% of children were asymptomatic carriers. Hence, unknowingly they would transmit the SARS-Cov-2 virus to other children and adults. Children are more likely to have mild or no symptoms so it would be virtually impossible to detect the infection. This has significant risks for their peers and teachers or staff from BAME backgrounds.

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Dr Ramesh Mehta OBE, Paediatrician and President of the BAPIO said “We are extremely worried that as schools reopen, not only BAME children will be exposed to COVID-19 and serious “Multisystem inflammatory syndrome ” (MIS) but also BAME teachers and others staff will be exposed to COVID -19 Disease”. We are writing to the Chief Medical Officer and Secretary of State for Education on the urgent need for risk assessment is carried out for all staff and children from BAME backgrounds and given additional protection, until our knowledge of vulnerabilities improves and effective vaccination strategies are implemented. If not, we are likely to see a new dimension in this COVID-19 pandemic. There is also need for more research to find out the reasons why some communities are more at risk”.

Dr JS Bamrah CBE said “It’s imperative that we prevent a second wave of the pandemic. This can only be achieved by reducing risk and taking precautions. BAPIO has been raising these issues across all vulnerable populations, particularly in the BAME community, and therefore we need to have a better understanding of COVID infections in children so that they, their teachers and their grandparents can be protected. Research is urgently required on these aspects”.

<https://physicianjnl.net/index.php/phy/article/view/35>

Dated 19 June 2020

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Notes for Editors

Since its inception in 1996, British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) has actively promoted the principles of diversity and equality. Over the years the Association has grown in stature and influence. It is represented through active Divisions covering all the English Regions as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is now one of the largest organisations of its type in the country. BAPIO is committed to ensuring that the NHS provides the best patient outcomes. By promoting professional excellence and leadership, BAPIO adds value in enhancing the skills of the medical workforce. BAPIO also contributes to the cause of promoting access to better health care globally and responds to aid victims of natural disasters in the world.

Further information

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