

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Paediatrics Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	Closing schools for SARS-CoV-2: A pragmatic rapid recommendation.
AUTHORS	Bekkering, Geertruida Delvaux, Nicolas Vankrunkelsven, Patrik Toelen, Jaan Aertgeerts, Sigrid Crommen, Sofie Debruyckere, Pedro Devisch, Ignaas Lernout, Tinne Masschalck, Katrien Milissen, Nore Molenberghs, Geert Pascal, Annelies Plomteux, Oscar Raes, Marc Rans, Lise Seghers, Alexandra Sweldens, Lode Vandenbussche, Jeroen; Vanham, Guido; Wollants, Elke Aertgeerts, Bert

VERSION 1 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Reviewer name: Dr. Morris Gordon Institution and Country: University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Competing interests: None
REVIEW RETURNED	23-Dec-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>I must confess to being initially a bit biased and hostile to this work - it was country specific and often with guidelines in a scarcity of evidence, these tend to be very eminence based.</p> <p>I was pleasantly surprised when I read the work. The guideline has a clear methodology and it is clearly aligned with GRADE.</p> <p>The text flows and the appendices support with detail.</p> <p>The key item is the illustration / summary booklet - this is excellent and in itself forms a model for dissemination and reproduction.</p> <p>In fact, whilst not novel in pieces, when pulled together it felt fresh and useful. Therefore, my one request of the authors would be to make the raw files available as a template for other guideline producers, subject to creative commons license with citation of original - I think that is key</p> <p>I have no other changes to suggest</p>
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REVIEWER	Reviewer name: Dr. Luis Rajmil Institution and Country: Homer 22 1rst 1, Barcelona, 08023, Spain Competing interests: None
REVIEW RETURNED	29-Dec-2020

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>The study is important and provides information and recommendations regarding school closing during the pandemic. Furthermore, the study seems generalizable both with respect to the review and the recommendations. The authors should consider the following aspects to improve the study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Panel formation: it is not specified how it was selected and the characteristics of the panel members and if this could have any potential influence on the results 2) The analysis of the data based on the comparison between May and September: although the authors already specify it in the limitations, the diagnostic criteria and the percentage of population screened were very different and this may distort the results 3) The analysis of some questionnaires as main outcome variables, such as the GHQ-12, is not appropriate in minors. The authors should in any case include data on reliability and validity in the population under 14 years of age in Belgium. 4) Related to point 1, the panel argues the impact of the measures on the most vulnerable group of children, but does not comment on the effect on social inequalities as part of the analysis and recommendations regarding the measures to be taken. This aspect could be important if in Belgium there is a percentage of the population with fewer resources, less access to education, health services, and in housing conditions with more needs
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VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Please find below our reply to the reviewers' comments.

Reviewer: 1

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I have no other changes to suggest

Reply: Thank you for your positive feedback. In order to make the raw files available as a template for other guideline producers, we suggest adding the rapid recommendation on MAGICapp, a digital authoring and publication platform with a link added to the manuscript.

We added two PDF files to this submission for you to see how this link currently looks. Can you please advise us whether more details are needed in order to be useful for other guideline producers? We then will activate the link so the information become publicly available.

We have added as follows

"All details of this guidelines are available via MAGICapp: <https://app.magicapp.org/#/guideline/4746>"

Reviewer: 2

The study is important and provides information and recommendations regarding school closing during

the pandemic. Furthermore, the study seems generalizable both with respect to the review and the recommendations. The authors should consider the following aspects to improve the study:

1) Panel formation: it is not specified how it was selected and the characteristics of the panel members and if this could have any potential influence on the results

Reply: We agree that the recruitment and characteristics of the panel may influence the results. The revised manuscript contains one additional sentence on recruitment and a table with basic characteristics of the panel (see manuscript).

"Recruitment of involved public (students, parents, teachers and school managers) was pragmatically, for clinicians and researchers we identified seniors in their field of expertise."

2) The analysis of the data based on the comparison between May and September: although the authors already specify it in the limitations, the diagnostic criteria and the percentage of population screened were very different and this may distort the results

Reply: We have added this in our discussion as follows

"While these limitations do not change our conclusion, it is important to remember that they may distort the results."

3) The analysis of some questionnaires as main outcome variables, such as the GHQ-12, is not appropriate in minors. The authors should in any case include data on reliability and validity in the population under 14 years of age in Belgium.

Reply: Thank you for raising this point. We are aware of the limited evidence on appropriateness of the GHQ-12 in minors, although there is some evidence from an Australian study in adolescents aged 11 to 15 years (Tait 2003). We have added this information in the discussion section as follows

"Finally, although one Australian study suggests the GHQ-12 is a valid index of psychological wellbeing in young adolescents (Tait et al 2003), this needs further assessment, also in younger children."

Tait RJ, French DJ, Hulse GK. Validity and psychometric properties of the General Health Questionnaire-12 in young Australian adolescents *Clinical Trial Aust N Z J Psychiatry* 2003 Jun;37(3):374-81. doi: 10.1046/j.1440-1614.2003.01133.x.

4) Related to point 1, the panel argues the impact of the measures on the most vulnerable group of children, but does not comment on the effect on social inequalities as part of the analysis and recommendations regarding the measures to be taken. This aspect could be important if in Belgium there is a percentage of the population with fewer resources, less access to education, health services, and in housing conditions with more needs

Reply: We have addressed this in the Discussion as follows:

"COVID-19 impacts those with low socioeconomic status unequally (Baena-Diez 2020; Martins-Filho 2020). Although we did not examine the effect of school closure on social inequalities, an increase is likely as the learning delay also affects disadvantaged children disproportionately. The reduction of social inequalities would be an argument to keep schools open. Another argument is that schools are an entry point for reaching all population groups, also those people that the normal media can't reach.

Baena-Díez JM, Barroso M, Cordeiro-Coelho SI, Díaz JL, and Grau M. Impact of COVID-19 outbreak by income: hitting hardest the most deprived. *J Public Health (Oxf)*. 2020 Aug 7 : fdaa136.; doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdaa136

Martins-Filho PR, de Souza Araújo, AA, Quintans-Júnior LJ, and Santos VS. COVID-19 fatality rates related to social inequality in Northeast Brazil: a neighbourhood-level analysis. *J Travel Med*. 2020 Aug 6 : taaa128. doi: 10.1093/jtm/taaa128

Editor in Chief

Comments to the Author:

What this study adds - the first two statements are methods not what you found, therefore delete them. You may wish to separate the last statement into two sentences. Consider adding "learning delay disproportionately affects disadvantaged children" as a third statement

Table 2 may be better as two tables. One documenting benefits and the other harms.

It is unclear where Appendix 1 finishes and what is in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

It would be good to include Appendix 1 (pages 16-18) within the actual paper as a Figure (if this is possible) (small typo on page 17 in heading :should be "and" not "en"

Reply: Thank you for these comments. In the revised manuscript:

- We deleted the first two statements and added a new one on learning delay
- We split Table 2 (now Table 3) in 2 separate tables
- We increased the size of headings for Appendixes 2 and 3
- The typo of Appendix 1 has been amended. We are happy to include the first 3 pages of Appendix 1 within the actual paper. These 3 pages have been added as separate tif files. The remaining three pages can remain as Appendix 1.