

# Closing schools?

The Republic of Ireland and Scotland have closed their schools. The rest of the UK has not. I invite views on this.

I do not have a strong view myself as I am not an expert on the virus and do not have access to much of the medical and statistical information about it.

The latest medical view I heard from the government is that the virus either does not attach to so many children, or if it does many remain without visible symptoms. If many children do or will experience a mild or invisible form of the illness it may be impossible to know whether tested or not whether they have had the virus. The test apparently works better on people with symptoms. Medical opinion seems agreed children are the least likely to get a bad version of it and extremely unlikely to die from it.

The one plus from shutting schools is it prevents circulation of the virus between pupils and teachers in school. If the pupils off school continue to socialise with each other and with other adults a lot of this benefit is lost. Only if they go home and stay at home would there be a major and lasting reduction in their number of contacts and therefore in their vulnerability to picking up the virus. If they already have the virus spending all their time at home might increase the chances of other family members contracting it.

There are several negatives in closing schools. Many more adults will have to give up work and mind their children at home. These will include many nurses, doctors and other health workers needed to work in the hospitals and surgeries to tackle the health emergency. Those who make a living out of supplying and providing contract work for schools will lose their income. Education, exams and training will be interrupted, disrupting the life chances of those facing early public examinations that matter.

I am happy with the government's decision so far not to close the schools. It is difficult to believe closing the schools would slow the spread much or protect many more people. Limiting access to care homes and places where vulnerable elderly live might achieve more in limiting infections of those most at risk.