

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri



Abstract

**COVID-19 AND CHILDREN:
FROM BIRTH TO SCHOOL AGE**

23 October 2020

The ICB highlights the specific repercussions induced by the pandemic on the global health of children and on the main underlying bioethical aspects, with specific attention from the very first existing correlations in the maternal-fetal-neonatal unit, up to the early stages of development such as infancy and childhood.

In the context of pregnancy, childbirth and neonatal life, precaution and responsibility are indicated as the essential bioethical principles of the "care relationship" for people who need specific protection. The analysis on the condition of children in preschool and school age is in-depth in terms of health aspects, paying particular attention to the fragility of children with chronic diseases, disabilities, rare diseases and the discontinuity of care. The psychological and social consequences of the *lockdown* are taken into consideration, paying specific attention to social hardship and economic-social-cultural inequalities. The opinion specifically addresses the consequences of the closure of schools, the problems related to the reopening of schools and distance learning, highlighting the opportunities and criticalities (in particular the burden on daily life for families and the digital divide, i.e. the gap between those who have effective access to information technologies and those who are partially or totally excluded).

The Committee, in the context of the indissoluble interweaving of political, economic, social, clinical and health problems in this area, recalls the need for a framing of the problems within the bioethical perspective of precaution, prudence and responsibility in the commitment to protect above all those who are in situations of specific and temporary vulnerability. The Committee recognises the interests of the minor as a fundamental ethical-legal criterion for evaluating the benefit-risk ratio of the pandemic containment measures and identifies the centrality of school as a part of the personal and social development of children. It also points out the need to promote multidisciplinary research on the bio-psycho-social determinants of child health within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which can form the basis of the interdisciplinary guidelines for mitigating the negative effects and overcoming the problematical issues that have arisen in terms of health and on the psychological and social level.

The Committee recommends specific care and psychological support for the most vulnerable children with disabilities or those from difficult family situations, who have suffered most from the effects of the pandemic and the closure of educational services; the promotion of education directed to personal and public responsibility for health, both within the school curricular process as well as through extracurricular training initiatives with the involvement of family members and school staff.