



# 'Explosion' of children with tics and Tourette's from lockdown

Doctors seeing 'worrisome upshift' in youngsters whose stress or anxiety has led them to suffer from debilitating tics

By Camilla Turner, EDUCATION EDITOR

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Lockdown has led to an “explosion” of children with disabling tics disorders and Tourette's syndrome, the president of the British Paediatric Neurology Association has said.

Consultants across the country have seen a “worrisome upshift” in the number of youngsters whose [stress or anxiety](#) has led them to suffer from debilitating tics, according to Dr Alasdair Parker.

His remarks come amid warnings that children will suffer [life-long consequences from lockdown](#) and that the “young have been sacrificed for the old” during the pandemic.

Dr Parker told The Telegraph that while mild tics can be fairly common in children, specialists have noted a marked increase in children displaying far more “troublesome” and complex issues in recent months.

“The most severe tics disorders I have seen over the last 20 years have all presented in the last five months to my practise,” Dr Parker said.

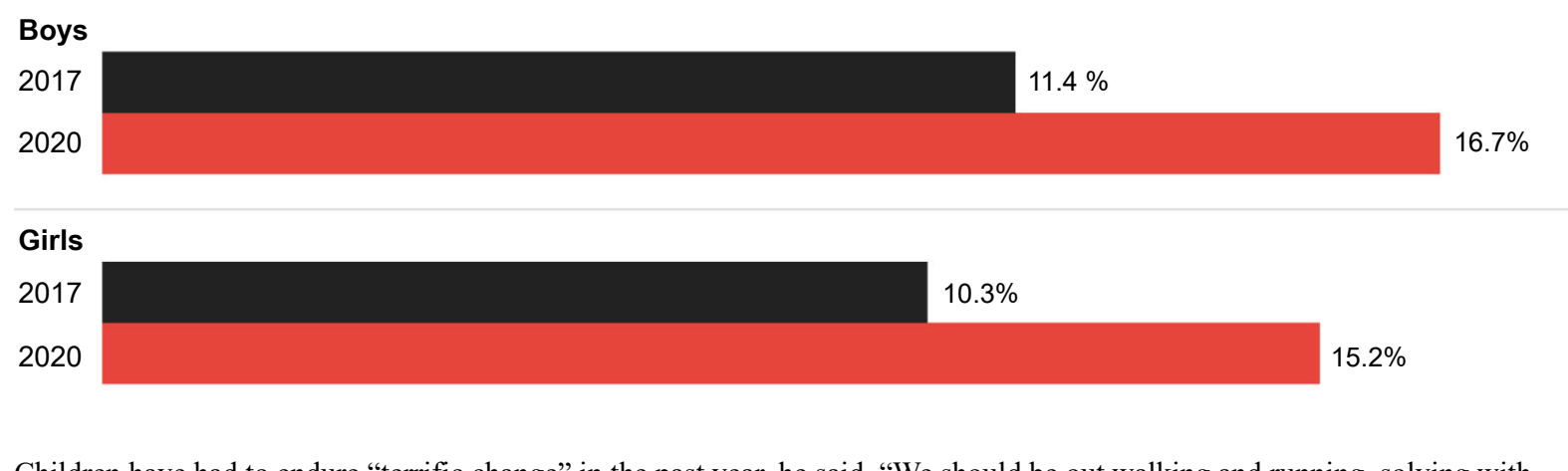
He said that the word “explosion” is now being used among paediatric neurologists such as himself, as well as mental health specialists, to describe the number of children presenting with tics disorders and Tourette's.

Tics are fast, repetitive muscle movements that result in sudden and involuntary body jolts or sounds. While mild tics are fairly common in children, then can develop over time into a more serious condition, or Tourette's syndrome which is used to describe tics that have lasted for more than a year.

Dr Parker explained that when attempting to treat tics or Tourette's, consultants always seek to address any issues that might be causing them stress, anxiety or upheaval.

## Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020

Proportion of children experiencing a probable mental disorder, aged 5 to 16



Children have had to endure “terrific change” in the past year, he said. “We should be out walking and running, solving with multiple different problems each day, working our social group out, dealing with threats and resolving issues.

“Children, at the moment, are [not having much social contact](#) at all so they are not doing the normal things they should be doing.”

Youngsters are also being “bombarded” with catastrophic language about the pandemic. “They have been worried about family members dying and they are very worried about the welfare of friends because they can't touch base with those people.”

Dr Parker said that while it is “brilliant” the country has made “such big sacrifices” to protect the elderly, this must be balanced up with the harms to youngsters.

One mother told The Telegraph how her 13-year-old daughter had been a star pupil, on track to achieve top grades in her GCSEs, and aspired to become a vet.

But now all of this is in doubt after she developed such a severe tics disorder that she can no longer eat or sleep and is covered in bruises from hitting herself.

The mother, who runs a healthcare consultancy in Nottingham, said that her daughter had been feeling low during lockdown but over time this “progressed into something far more severe”. Her consultant pediatrician confirmed that her tics have likely developed due to the stress of lockdown.

## How to tell if your child is depressed during lockdown

Changes in our children's behaviour and mood are expected in lockdown.

But Dr Jon Goldin, consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist at Great Ormond Street Hospital, says it can be difficult to separate the usual moodiness that comes with being a teenager from a mental health problem.

Dr Goldin says parents should consider if their teen's low mood is pervasive rather than occasional. Depression can also manifest as irritability, feeling “unusually easily upset or tearful; becoming withdrawn; not taking part in normal activities”. They might seem unable to take pleasure in things and “in severe cases, feeling hopeless about the future”.

If they talk about wanting to die, have reduced energy, feel tired all the time, find it hard to concentrate or experience unusually low self-esteem, these too can be signs of depression.

“Young children can certainly suffer from low mood when play time with their friends, birthday parties or cuddles from grandma are not there,” says Dr Elizabeth Kilbey, a consultant clinical psychologist who works with children both privately and in the NHS.

The term can “wrong-foot” adults, she says, and make them think of depression as a rare or serious thing. “In reality, depression in children is much more ordinary than that. It's noticing that your child isn't their usual self; perhaps there's a loss of pleasure from things they usually enjoy; a shift in appetite or sleep; they may be more easily bored and have trouble occupying themselves, and become more fractious.”

Talk to your child and if you have concerns, speak to your GP and share worries with someone you trust.

Rosa Silverman

“She shouts, she swears, she hits, she throws things, she drops to her knees, her legs kick out, her arms fly out, she head-butts things and smacks herself in the face” the mother said. “My child will require lifelong support from the NHS.

“Unfortunately the Government has sacrificed the young for the old and ultimately we will be paying the price with this generation of children for a very long time.”

Dr Karen Street, a consultant paediatrician and mental health lead at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said there has been a “significant increase” in [children being hospitalised for mental health issues](#).

“Almost certainly what is happening with tics and Tourette's is just one manifestation of worsening of mental health among young people,” she said.

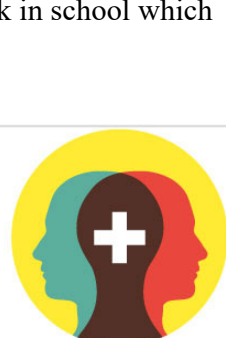
One in six children now have a mental health problem, according to NHS research, up from one in nine just three years ago.

Molly Kingsley, co-founder of the parent campaign group UsForThem, said that repeated lockdowns have led to “enduring and in some cases life changing consequences” for children.

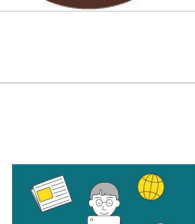
She added: “This is heartbreaking and once again it shows the absolute urgency of getting these children back in school which is where they belong.”

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