

FROM LOCKDOWN TO THE CLASSROOM: HOW COVID BABIES ARE STARTING SCHOOL IN 2025

by:

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In 2025, a unique group of children is stepping into classrooms for the very first time. Born in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, these “COVID babies” spent their earliest years in a world of lockdowns, social distancing, and uncertainty. Now, as they enter kindergarten or their first year of primary school, parents and educators are beginning to see just how those unusual beginnings have shaped them.

Many of these children grew up with limited contact outside their immediate family. Playdates were postponed, playgrounds were taped off, and routine health visits were often delayed or moved online. This meant that opportunities for group play, language exposure, and early social learning were far fewer than for previous generations. Teachers in places like England, Wales, and Australia are reporting a wide range of school readiness levels. Some children arrive confident and curious, but others are struggling—still in nappies, unable to climb stairs, lacking in basic motor skills, or hesitant to interact with classmates. In fact, surveys show that nearly half of reception teachers in the UK have noticed a decline in readiness compared to pre-pandemic cohorts.

Speech and language delays are one of the most common concerns. Lockdown life often meant fewer conversations with people outside the household, and for some, less exposure to group story times, singing, and peer chatter. As a result, thousands of children are now on waiting lists for speech therapy. Others show signs of developmental setbacks in coordination and independence, like difficulty using cutlery or dressing themselves. Teachers also note that some children struggle with emotional regulation,

finding it harder to adapt to the structured rhythm of school after spending so much time in close, informal home environments.

But it's not all a story of loss. For some COVID babies, the extra time at home meant more one-on-one attention from parents, stronger family bonds, and opportunities for focused, individual learning. Educators say a portion of the cohort arrives with impressive early reading skills, heightened creativity, or deep knowledge in niche interests — gifts of uninterrupted time with engaged caregivers.

Globally, the educational recovery from the pandemic has been slow and uneven. Studies using large-scale data like TIMSS 2023 reveal that learning losses persist, especially among vulnerable groups, and experts warn that the ripple effects could be felt well into the 2030s. Governments are responding by investing in early language programs, expanding access to nurseries and family hubs, and introducing targeted interventions for children lagging behind in social, emotional, or academic development. Mental health support is also being prioritized, recognizing the strain the pandemic placed not just on learning but on wellbeing.

As these children take their first steps into the schoolyard, they carry with them a story unlike any other generation's — one of resilience and challenge, shaped by a world that was, for a time, closed off. Their journey will require patience, creativity, and collaboration between parents, teachers, and policymakers. But it also offers a chance to rethink how we support children at the very start of their educational lives, ensuring that, whether they began life in isolation or not, they can all find their place in the wider world of learning.

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