

Child abuse, specifically physical abuse, is associated with increased familial stressors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, families are experiencing numerous additional stressors – social isolation, loss of jobs, financial strain, worries of illness – while also losing the protective supports which may have previously been in place – schools, daycare, babysitters, friends, family, religious connections. This combination of increased stressors, decreased supports, and families being confined together for prolonged periods of time creates a “perfect storm” for child maltreatment.

Despite the increased risk of child physical abuse during this pandemic, the identified or reported cases of child physical abuse are currently lower than usual. This is likely a reflection of those services who first notice injuries to children or to whom children disclose are not as easily available (schools, daycares, physicians, counselors). Telehealth and virtual visits, while excellent for treating medical ailments while minimizing infectious risk, prevent us from speaking privately with children and from completing full body examinations for injuries.

While caring for families during in person or remote visits, please keep in mind the increased risk of child maltreatment and that there are still resources available if needed.

#### Recommendations

- Acknowledge to caregivers how stressful this can be and that no one is doing it perfectly
- Provide recommendations for discipline and discourage corporal punishment as it is not effective long-term and can make the child’s behavior worse
- Discuss the importance of self-care for caregivers including finding time for themselves
- Discuss the importance of staying connected with supports through phone calls, Zoom, FaceTime, etc.
- With school happening over the Internet and more computer time, monitor what the children are doing/sending online

#### Resources

- Prevent Child Abuse – website has nice resources for caregivers <https://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>
- Department of Children, Youth and Families – 1800 RI Child - DCYF is still taking reports on the hotline and is still doing investigations as normal
- Lawrence A. Aubin Sr. Child Protection Center (Aubin Center) – The Aubin Center is still seeing patients as usual – referrals can be made at 401 444 3996. An on-call physician is available 24/7 through the RIH call center, 401-444-4000 hit zero to speak with an operator and ask to page the on-call medical provider for the Aubin Center.
- KidsLink – Behavioral Health Resource Line: 1855 543 5465
- Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence: 1800 494 8100 <http://www.ricadv.org/en/covid-19-response>
- Family Care and Community Partnership (FCCP) - supports families in connecting with community services <http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/fccps/>