

Safeguarding updates:

Twice as many children report gambling problems

New figures from the Gambling Commission have revealed that the number of children classified as having a gambling problem has more than doubled in a year. The watchdog found that around a quarter of those aged 11-17 have gambled using their own money in the past year, with a "significant increase" in the number gambling at licensed bookmakers or placing bets online using family accounts, while the proportion of young people with a gambling problem rose from 0.7% to 1.5%, equivalent to around 85,000 young people. Former Conservative leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith warned that gambling firms "are completely out of control and seem to be going after young people", while a spokesperson said the Government is "absolutely committed to strengthening protections for those at risk, including young people".

The Guardian

Sharp rise in pupils suspended for sexual misconduct

New figures have revealed that there has been a sharp rise in the number of children suspended from both primary and secondary schools for sexual misconduct. Over the last two years, the report revealed, the number of primary school pupils suspended for sexual misconduct rose from 243 to 628, while the number of suspensions in secondary schools rose from 2,788 to 5,312. In ten cases, reception class pupils aged just four were suspended for sexual offences. A recent parliamentary report identified growing problems with a wide range of sexual misconduct - from name-calling, touching and slapping to boys displaying pornography on mobile devices or sending nude images to girls.

Express.co.uk Sunday Express

Urgent action needed to tackle youth knife crime

Serious youth violence in England is pervasive, affecting children across various demographics. A report by Ofsted, police, and probation inspectors highlights alarming trends, revealing that children as young as 11 are carrying knives for protection. Chief Inspector Martyn Oliver warned: "Knife crime is blighting the lives of too many children in England. It's a national scandal." The report underscores the need for early intervention and effective local partnerships to combat this issue. Inspectors noted that while some areas are successfully reducing harm, many are not adequately addressing serious youth violence, leaving children vulnerable. The report also praises initiatives like "navigators" in hospitals that connect young victims with support services. Michelle Skeer, His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, emphasised the importance of timely police intervention to protect children. The findings stress that collaboration among councils, schools, and charities can significantly mitigate risks associated with youth violence.

The Guardian

Health professionals call for new guidance on screen time

A group of dozens of health professionals, including paediatricians, psychologists, public health experts and GPs, has written to the chief medical officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty,

to call for the Government's official advice on screen time to be urgently updated. The current advice was published in 2019, and the group says there has since been "substantial" evidence that excessive screen time and use of social media are linked to a range of issues in children, from mental health issues to problems with sleep, eyesight, speech, language development and body image. "As clinicians", they write, "we witness these harmful effects daily, and academics are now establishing causal connections."

The Sunday Telegraph

Review calls for 'wholesale change' to stop abuse within families

A national review commissioned by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and conducted by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) has called for a "wholesale change in training, supervision and leadership" to ensure that cases of intrafamilial child sexual abuse are identified and dealt with. The review found that children are "all too often ignored or disbelieved" when they report abuse, while risks posed by adult family members are "frequently overlooked, misunderstood or minimised". Panel chair Annie Hudson said in many cases, the risk of harm "was known, and often over many years, but ignored, denied or deflected", meaning it was "often not a matter of professionals not knowing about the risk of abuse, but rather of a system that simply does not see, notice and comprehend this type of risk".

London Evening Standard

MPs back smoking ban and youth vaping crackdown

MPs have voted by 415 to 47 to back proposals introduced under Rishi Sunak and revived by the new Labour Government to make it illegal for anyone currently aged 15 or younger to buy cigarettes, along with other measures to tackle a recent rise in youth vaping. Health Secretary Wes Streeting said the new legislation, on which Conservative MPs were given a free vote, will create "the first smoke-free generation and eventually a smoke-free nation", with the new measures adding up to "the most significant public health intervention in a generation.

BBC News

Social media ban could protect children

Hetti Barkworth-Nanton, chair of Refuge charity, highlighted the connection between social media and the rise in sexual harassment among schoolchildren after receiving a CBE. She commented: "We are seeing something like well over 30% of young girls in schools are saying that they have experienced sexual harassment or abuse, and that is direct result of social media." Barkworth-Nanton praised the Australian Senate's decision to implement a social media ban for under-16s, calling it "absolutely the right way to go." She urged schools to proactively ban phones and called for collaboration between social media companies to prevent harmful content from reaching young users. Additionally, she emphasised the need for an overhaul of the criminal justice system to better support survivors of domestic abuse.

London Evening Standard