



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## New Analysis Shows Thousands of Young Children with Developmental Delays Missed Out on Time-Sensitive Services during COVID-19

**January 15, 2021 (NEW YORK CITY)** — Today, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) released a new data brief, [\*Delayed Interventions: Early Indicators of the Pandemic's Impact on Infants and Toddlers\*](#), showing a steep decline during the COVID-19 pandemic in the number of infants and toddlers referred to the New York City Early Intervention (EI) program to address concerns about their development. As a result, thousands of young children with developmental delays or disabilities missed the chance for intervention at the time it is most effective.

The first few years of life, when the brain is developing rapidly, offer a critical window of opportunity to intervene and maximize the positive impact of services like speech and physical therapy on a child's development, and Early Intervention—part of the federal special education law—provides such services to zero-to-three-year-old children with developmental delays or disabilities. When COVID-19 closed child care programs, led parents to postpone routine visits to the pediatrician, and otherwise disrupted daily life for families with young children, this window slammed shut for thousands of infants and toddlers in New York City. The brief released today, which analyzes data from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), shows that:

- In late March and early April 2020, there was an 82% drop-off, compared to the beginning of the year, in the average number of children referred to EI each week due to concerns about their development.
- An estimated 3,000–6,000 young children in New York City were never identified as potentially having a developmental delay or disability. Instead of being evaluated to determine their eligibility for the EI program and potentially receiving services to support their healthy development, these children have simply fallen off the radar—and thus may require more intensive, and expensive, special education services later on.
- The total number of infants and toddlers receiving EI services between July and September 2020 was 15% lower than the same time period in 2019, a difference of nearly 2,900 children.

In addition, many children with developmental delays and disabilities who were receiving EI services prior to the pandemic stopped getting their legally mandated services after the City shut down in March, whether due to a lack of technology, because teletherapy proved ineffective, or because helping children under age 3 participate in remote services proved logistically impossible for some working parents. According to phone surveys conducted by DOHMH, which runs the EI program, between April and mid-June, nearly one in four families (24%) were not receiving any of their EI services as of the time they were surveyed.

“Infants and toddlers cannot afford to wait for critically important Early Intervention services,” said Kim Sweet, AFC’s Executive Director. “The State and City need to take quick action to ensure young children with developmental delays and disabilities get the services they need right away.”

While the analysis focuses on data from New York City, statewide data show similar trends. Across New York State, 6,000 fewer children were enrolled in the EI program between July and September 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.

The brief makes a number of recommendations to New York State and City for addressing the pandemic’s impact on the Early Intervention program, including:

- Launching an outreach campaign to families and developing a comprehensive plan for developmental screenings to ensure young children are connected to services as soon as possible when a concern is identified;
- Identifying and addressing barriers to participation in EI during the pandemic, including by providing access to technology needed for remote evaluations and services;
- Providing make-up services to children who missed out on mandated therapies during the pandemic; and
- Increasing funding in the State budget for Early Intervention and preschool special education, including by requiring health insurance companies to contribute more to the cost of EI, and preparing for a potential post-COVID surge in referrals.

The data analysis and complete recommendations are available at:

[www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/delayed\\_interventions\\_data\\_brief\\_1.2021.pdf](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/delayed_interventions_data_brief_1.2021.pdf)

### **About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)**

*Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.*