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Myopia incidence rises during lockdowns

George Russell in Hong Kong

Hong Kong researchers say children cooped up under lockdowns with daily routines to indoor activities such as using a computer or reading have triggered a boom in myopia, or short-sightedness.

A recent study by the Chinese University of Hong Kong medicine faculty conducted a study to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic found a 2.5-fold increase in myopia incidence.

The findings have been published in the international journal British Journal of Ophthalmology.

One group of children aged 6-8 years old was recruited at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, and another was recruited before the pandemic.

All children received ocular examinations, and answered a standardised questionnaire relating to their lifestyle, including time spent on outdoor activities and near work, both at baseline and at follow-up visits.

The overall incidence of myopia was 19.44 per cent in the Covid-19 cohort, and 36.57 per cent in the pre-Covid-19 cohort.

“We showed a potential increase in myopia incidence, significant decrease in outdoor time and increase in screen time among schoolchildren in Hong Kong during the Covid-19 pandemic,” the researchers wrote.

“Our results serve to warn eye care professionals, and also policy makers, educators and parents, that collective efforts are needed to prevent childhood myopia—a potential public health crisis as a result of Covid-19.”