

Briefing

Online Child Protection during COVID-19

Key asks:

- **Actively promote online safety advice and tips to your constituents.**
- **Encourage the public to accurately report suspected child sexual abuse material online to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF).**
- **Ensure that Government keeps the protection of children high on the political agenda as children and those who seek to exploit them are spending more time online during this crisis.**

Social-distancing measures may be leading children to be more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse:

- We, along with our colleagues in the [UK Safer Internet Centre](#), are encouraging parents to have a discussion with their children about their safety online. **There are lots of great resources which you can promote to your constituents [here](#).**
- The National Crime Agency has [estimated](#) that 300,000 individuals in the UK pose a sexual threat to children, either through contact abuse or online.
- In 2019, the IWF actioned 132,700 webpages containing the sexual abuse of children. Each webpage could contain one to thousands of images or videos. A third of these webpages contained 'self-generated content' of indecent images of children, children who have been coerced and groomed into producing these records of sexual abuse. Of these, 96% featured girls, 86% of those within the 11-13 age range. We are anticipating this material to increase during the current crisis.

An essential public service, the IWF remains open. However, accurate public reporting is crucial:

- The Home Office has recognised our analysts as key workers, and our offices continue to be open to receive reports from members of the public. We are, however, operating at a reduced capacity in order to ensure the health and safety of our staff.
- We continue to provide a place for the public to [report to](#), and to provide essential services to the technology industry to keep the internet free from images and videos of child sexual abuse. Our Hotline continues to proactively seek this content, wherever it is hosted in the world, and work to have it removed.
- We want you to encourage accurate public reporting. Reports that fall outside our remit waste our analyst's vital time, potentially stopping them from finding and eliminating indecent images of children from the internet. At a time where we are anticipating seeing more actionable content and decreased reviewing resource, accurate public reporting has never been more important.

As the moderation landscape diminishes, the work of the IWF has never been more critical:

- Tech companies **are increasingly relying on automated flagging tools** and AI-powered review systems in assisting them with the response to this crisis. These are usually complemented by human reviewers to ensure accurate assessment. Human Moderation of CSAM can only be carried out in an office setting; many are doing this albeit at a reduced capacity.
- Whilst companies are **continuing to prioritise their response to incidents of CSAM**, aided by tools (hash sets, keywords, webpage blocking) provided by the IWF, there is the potential for more complex cases that may require human review to take longer for review due to reductions in moderator numbers.
- As other hotlines also reduce their moderators, **content is remaining live for longer**, this increases both the size and importance of the IWF's webpage blocking list (URL list) deployed by ISPs and filters which prevents members of the public from viewing illegal CSAM imagery.