

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Human Coronaviruses

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/index.html>) are a family of viruses that usually cause illnesses like the common cold. Almost everyone gets one of these viruses at some point in their lives. Most of the time the illness only lasts for a short time.

COVID-19: a new coronavirus

It was discovered in December 2019 and has now spread throughout the world. As the virus spreads, we are seeing some people with mild illness, some who get very sick, and some who have died. The reason health officials are concerned is because the virus is new, which makes it hard to predict how it will continue to affect people. Researchers and doctors are learning more about it every day, including exactly how it spreads and who is most at risk.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild to severe and can include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Who is at risk?

According to the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>), children do not seem to be at higher risk for getting COVID-19. However, some people are, including

- Older adults
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions like:
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Lung disease
 - Suppressed immune systems

How to protect your family

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19, but there are a few things you can do to keep your family healthy:

- Wash your hands (</English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Hand-Washing-A-Powerful-Antidote-to-Illness.aspx>) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Keep-Hand-Sanitizer-Out-of-Childrens-Reach.aspx>). Look for one that is 60% or higher alcohol-based.
- Keep your kids away from others who are sick or keep them home if they are ill.
- Teach kids to cough and sneeze into a tissue (make sure to throw it away after each use!) or to cough and sneeze into their arm or elbow, not their hands.
- Clean and disinfect (</English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Cleaners-Sanitizers-Disinfectants.aspx>) your home as usual using regular household cleaning sprays or wipes.



- Avoid touching your face; teach your children to do the same.
- Avoid travel to highly infected areas (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/locations-confirmed-cases.html#map>).

A note about facemasks: The CDC only recommends facemasks for people who have symptoms of COVID-19, not for people who are healthy. Healthcare workers and anyone taking care of someone with COVID-19 should wear facemasks.

If your child has been exposed to COVID-19, or you are concerned about your child's symptoms, call your pediatrician immediately.

How to prepare for the possibility of school or childcare closings

If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in your community, local public health officials may decide to temporarily close schools and childcare centers to help slow the spread of the virus. Schools also may decide to dismiss students early if there are too many students or staff absent. Many schools use email to update families. Be sure your child's school knows how to get in touch with you.

Working parents can be prepared by having alternative childcare plans or talking with their employers about work from home options during school closings. If your child attends a college or university, encourage them to learn about the school's plan for a COVID-19 outbreak.

If your children need to stay at home due to the outbreak, try to keep their days as routine and scheduled as possible. Here are a few tips that can help:

- **Read books with your child.** It's not only fun, but reading together (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Help-Your-Child-Enjoy-Reading-Aloud-Tips-for-Parents.aspx>) strengthens your bond with your child AND helps their development.
- **Make time for active play.** Bring out the blocks, balls, jump ropes and buckets and let the creativity go. Play games (</English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Motor-Activity-and-Self-Play.aspx>) that kids of all ages can play, like tag or duck duck goose. Let your kids make up new games. Encourage older kids to make up a workout or dance to keep them moving.
- **Keep an eye on media time.** Whenever possible, play video games or go online with your child to keep that time structured and limited. If kids are missing their school friends or other family, try video chats to stay in touch.

Talking to children about COVID-19

There's a lot of news coverage about the outbreak of COVID-19 and it can be overwhelming for parents and frightening to kids. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents and others who work closely with children to filter information and talk about it in a way that their child can understand. These tips can help:

- **Simple reassurance.** Remind children that researchers and doctors are learning as much as they can, as quickly as they can, about the virus and are taking steps to keep everyone safe.
- **Give them control.** It's also a great time to remind your children of what they can do to help – washing their hands often, coughing into a tissue or their sleeves, and getting enough sleep.
- **Watch for signs of anxiety.** Children may not have the words to express their worry, but you may see signs of it. They may get cranky, be more clingy, have trouble sleeping, or seem distracted. Keep the reassurance going and try to stick to your normal routines.
- **Monitor their media.** Keep young children away from frightening images they may see on TV, social media, computers, etc. For older children, talk together about what they are hearing on the news and correct any misinformation or rumors you may hear.
- **Be a good role model.** COVID-19 doesn't discriminate and neither should we. While COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China, it doesn't mean that having Asian ancestry – or any other ancestry – makes someone more susceptible to the virus or more contagious. Stigma and discrimination hurt everyone by creating fear or anger towards others. When you show empathy and support to those who are ill, your children will too.

Stay informed

Families are encouraged to stay up to date about this situation as we learn more about how to prevent this virus from spreading in homes and in communities.

[Back to Top](#)

More Information:

- [Hand Washing: A Powerful Antidote to Illness \(/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Hand-Washing-A-Powerful-Antidote-to-Illness.aspx\)](#)
- [When to Keep Your Child Home from Child Care \(/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/When-to-Keep-Your-Child-Home-from-Child-Care.aspx\)](#)
- [Talking to Children About Tragedies & Other News Events \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Talking-To-Children-About-Tragedies-and-Other-News-Events.aspx\)](#)
- [Coronavirus Prevention and Treatment \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/prevention.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/about/prevention.html) (CDC)

Last Updated 3/12/2020

Source American Academy of Pediatrics (Copyright © 2020)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.