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Caring for Children

Tips to keep children healthy while school's out

Based on available evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. While some children and infants have been sick with COVID-19, adults make up most of the known cases to date. You can learn more about who is most at risk for health problems if they have COVID-19 infection on [Are you at higher risk for severe illness](#).

Steps to protect children from getting sick

- **Clean hands often** using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- **Avoid people who are sick** (coughing and sneezing)
- **Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces daily** in household common areas (e.g. tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, remotes, handles, desks, toilets, sinks)
- **Launder items** including washable plush toys as appropriate in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If possible, launder items using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely. Dirty laundry from an ill person can be washed with other people's items.

You can find additional information on preventing COVID-19 at [Prevention for 2019 Novel Coronavirus](#) and at [Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Communities](#). Additional information on how COVID-19 is spread is available at [How COVID-19 Spreads](#).

Children may present with mild symptoms

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar in children and adults. However, children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally presented with mild symptoms. Reported symptoms in children include cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Vomiting and diarrhea have also been reported. It's not known yet whether some children may be at higher risk for severe illness, for example, children with underlying medical conditions and special healthcare needs. There is more to learn about how the disease impacts children.

Children don't need to wear facemasks

No. If your child is healthy, there is no need for them to wear a facemask. Only people who have symptoms of illness or who are providing care to those who are ill should wear masks.

School Dismissals

Children and their friends

Limit Social Interactions: The key to slowing the spread of COVID-19 is to limit contact as much as possible. While school is out, children should not have playdates with children from other households. If children are playing outside their own homes, it is essential that they remain 6 feet from anyone who is not in their own household.

Practice Social Distancing: If you have small meetups, consider hanging out with another family or friend who is also taking extra measures to put distance between themselves and others (social distancing).

Clean Hands Often: Make sure children practice [everyday preventive behaviors](#), such as washing their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important if you have been in a public place.

Revise Spring Break & Travel Plans: Revise spring break and travel plans if they included non-essential travel.

Remember, if children meet outside of school in bigger groups, it can put everyone at risk.

Information about [COVID-19 in children](#) is somewhat limited, but current data suggest children with COVID-19 may only have mild symptoms. However, they can still pass this virus onto others who may be at higher risk, including [older adults and people who have serious underlying medical conditions](#).

Help children continue learning

Stay in touch with your child's school.

- Many schools are offering lessons online (virtual learning). Review assignments from the school, and help your child establish a reasonable pace for completing the work. You may need to assist your child with turning on devices, reading instructions, and typing answers.
- Communicate challenges to your school. If you face technology or connectivity issues, or if your child is having a hard time completing assignments, let the school know.

Create a schedule and routine for learning at home, but remain flexible.

- Have consistent bedtimes and get up at the same time, Monday through Friday.
- Structure the day for learning, free time, healthy meals and snacks, and physical activity.
- Allow flexibility in the schedule—it's okay to adapt based on your day.

Consider the needs and adjustment required for your child's age group.

- The transition to being at home will be different for preschoolers, K-5, middle school students, and high school students. Talk to your child about expectations and how they are adjusting to being at home versus at school.
- Consider ways your child can stay connected with their friends without spending time in person.

Look for ways to make learning fun.

- Have hands-on activities, like puzzles, painting, drawing, and making things.
- Independent play can also be used in place of structured learning. Encourage children to build a fort from sheets or practice counting by stacking blocks.
- Practice handwriting and grammar by writing letters to family members. This is a great way to connect and limit face-to-face contact.
- Start a journal with your child to document this time and discuss the shared experience.
- Use audiobooks or see if your local library is hosting virtual or live-streamed reading events.

School meal services

Check with your school on plans to continue meal services during the school dismissal. Many schools are keeping school facilities open to allow families to pick up meals or are providing grab-and-go meals at a central location.

Keep children healthy

Watch your child for any signs of illness.

- If you see any sign of illness consistent with [symptoms of COVID-19](#), particularly fever, cough, or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider and keep your child at home and away from others as much as possible. Follow CDC's guidance on ["What to do if you are sick."](#)

Watch for signs of stress in your child.

- Some common changes to watch for include excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, and difficulty with attention and concentration. For more information, see the "For Parents" section on CDC's website, [Manage Anxiety and Stress](#).
- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and [share facts](#) about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Go to CDC's [Helping Children Cope with Emergencies](#) or [Talking with Children About COVID-19](#) for more information.

Teach and reinforce [everyday preventive actions](#).

- Parents and caretakers play an important role in teaching children to wash their hands. Explain that hand washing can keep them healthy and stop the virus from spreading to others.
- Be a good role model—if you wash your hands often, they're more likely to do the same.
- Make [handwashing a family activity](#).

Help your child stay active.

- Encourage your child to play outdoors—it's great for physical and mental health. Take a walk with your child or go on a bike ride.
- Use indoor activity breaks (e.g., stretch breaks, dance breaks) throughout the day to help your child stay healthy and focused.

Help your child stay socially connected.

- Reach out to friends and family via phone or video chats.
- Write cards or letters to family members they may not be able to visit.
- Some schools and non-profits, such as the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#) [↗](#) and [The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) [↗](#) , have resources for social and emotional learning. Check to see if your school has tips and guidelines to help support social and emotional needs of your child.

Limit time with older adults, relatives, and people with serious underlying medical conditions

[Older adults and people who have serious underlying medical conditions](#) are at highest risk of getting sick from COVID-19.

- If others in your home are at particularly [high risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#), consider extra precautions to **separate your child from those people**.
- If you are unable to stay home with your child during school dismissals, carefully consider who might be best positioned to provide child care. If someone at higher risk for COVID-19 will be providing care (older adult, such as a grandparent or someone with a chronic medical condition), **limit your children's contact with other people**.
- Consider **postponing visits or trip to see older family members and grandparents**. Connect virtually or by writing letters and sending via mail.

Page last reviewed: March 28, 2020

Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\)](#), [Division of Viral Diseases](#)