

## Caregiving in the Era of COVID-19: What to Do When You or Your Child Gets Sick

June 30, 2020

Most children who are sick with COVID-19 will have mild cases. However, some children and youth may develop a rare complication that can impact young people who have had COVID-19. It is called Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). Children/youth who develop this will need to be hospitalized for treatment. Not all children who develop MIS-C will have had symptoms of COVID-19, and some may have had symptoms weeks earlier.

**While rare, it is important that parents and caregivers know to look for the following symptoms:**

- Persistent fever lasting longer than 24 hours
- Exhaustion, feeling very tired
- Stomach pain
- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Rash
- Conjunctivitis (red or bloodshot eyes)
- Neck pain

Contact your doctor right away if your child has any of these symptoms.

**If your child has the following severe symptoms, seek emergency care:**

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain or pressure
- Bluish lips or face
- Severe abdominal pain
- Confusion
- Inability to stay awake or wake up

**If you don't have a doctor, contact the Community Health Access Program (CHAP) to find a dentist, doctor or nurse and quality health care you can afford. It's a free service and interpreters are available.**

- Phone: 1-800-756-5437
- Email: [CHAP@kingcounty.gov](mailto:CHAP@kingcounty.gov)
- Web: [www.kingcounty.gov/CHAP](http://www.kingcounty.gov/CHAP)

**[Learn more from the CDC](#) including information translated into Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese.**

When your child's sick, you're their nurturer, playmate, and live-in nurse all wrapped up into one person. But novel coronavirus (COVID-19) challenges us in new ways. Though usually mild in kids, COVID-19 can be serious for some adults. And that means it's especially important that you protect your own health. Here are some concrete steps you can take to keep your household healthy and to respond if you or your child gets sick.

## Are kids at risk of catching COVID-19?

Children can get COVID-19, but here's the good news: most kids will only have [minor symptoms](#) similar to the common cold. You might notice a cough, runny nose, sore throat, or fever. Vomiting and diarrhea are possible, but rarer. And some kids might not have any symptoms at all.

There's a lot we're still learning about COVID-19, like whether kids with underlying medical conditions or special healthcare needs are at higher risk. Medical and public health experts are working around the clock to learn as much as they can.

## How can I protect my family from COVID-19?

Take these important steps to prevent COVID-19 infection. If someone in your home gets sick, keep up these behaviors:

- **Practice social distancing.** [Social distancing](#) means increasing the space between people to avoid illness. Stay home as much as you can, and postpone playdates. Limit trips for groceries, gas, and other household needs. If you have to go out, stay at least 6 feet away from other people. And be certain to avoid contact with sick people. You won't need to social distance forever, but it's one of the best things we can do right now to stop the spread of COVID-19.
- **Wash your hands,** wash your hands, wash your hands. And then do it again. [Scrubbing with warm soap and water for 20 seconds](#) destroys COVID-19. If you can't make it to the sink right away, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Keep sanitizer away from kids under age two.
- **Avoid touching your face,** food, and shared objects with unwashed hands.

## What should I do if my child gets COVID-19?

You can take steps to minimize your own risk of infection while still meeting your child's basic needs.

### Designate a caretaker

- ❖ **Choose one person** in the household to be the primary caretaker for your child.
- ❖ **Keep other household members away** as much as possible.
- ❖ **Do not invite any unnecessary visitors.**
- ❖ **Look out for symptoms in all household members.** If anyone develops symptoms, contact a doctor. Always call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room.

### Seek medical advice, if needed

- ❖ **Call your child's doctor or set up an online visit.** Your doctor knows your child's health history and whether they have any special risks.
- ❖ **Pay attention to your child's symptoms.** Your child might need medical attention if they develop signs of more severe illness. Look out for fast breathing, fever that doesn't respond to fever-reducing medicine, or signs of dehydration (like peeing less than normal). Call 911 if your child has trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, or bluish lips or face. **Need help finding a doctor or getting health insurance?** Call the [Community Health Access Program \(CHAP\)](#): 1 (800) 756-5437 or the [Help Me Grow Washington Hotline](#): 1 (800) 322-2588.

### Treat the symptoms

- ❖ **Keep your child hydrated.** Make sure they drink a lot of fluids.
- ❖ **Consider over-the-counter medication for symptom relief.** Talk with your child's doctor about the correct medication and dose.

### Create physical distance

- ❖ **Use a separate bedroom and bathroom,** if at all possible. If that's not an option, try to stay at least 6 feet apart from each other when you're sleeping and interacting. This gets tough when you have small children who need diaper changes, help with feeding, and nighttime tuck-ins. Do what's realistic for your household.
- ❖ **Make sure that shared spaces have good airflow.** Open a window or turn on an air conditioner.
- ❖ **Avoid contact with pets.** Ask your child to postpone petting, snuggling, and getting kissed or licked.

### Clean and disinfect

- ❖ **Clean and disinfect all "high-touch" surfaces every day.** Clean surfaces like counters, doorknobs, bathrooms, diaper changing tables, toys, and crib railings. Be sure to disinfect any surfaces that may have blood, stool or body fluids on them. Pay special attention to shared bathrooms. If someone in your family has asthma, take [precautions](#) while cleaning to lower the risk of asthma attacks.
- ❖ **Wash laundry thoroughly.** Wear disposable gloves if you have them, and keep the laundry away from your body. Wash your hands immediately after handling laundry, even if you wore gloves.
- ❖ **Teach your kids to be germ busters.** Show them [fun ways to wash their hands](#). Ask them to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and then throw the used tissue in the trash.

### Take other precautions

- ❖ **Avoid sharing personal items.** Be sure your family members don't share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. Make sure to thoroughly wash and dry items that your child has handled before others use them.
- ❖ **Use a mask, if possible.** If your child's old enough to keep a mask on and you have one handy, ask them to wear it around other people. If that's not doable, consider wearing a mask when you're within six feet of each other. Keep in mind: there's a [critical shortage](#) of medical equipment right now, so only buy what you need. If you don't have a mask, consider using a scarf or bandana.

### I'm at **higher risk for serious illness**. What should I do if my child gets COVID-19?

- ❖ **If possible, rely on another adult in the household** for childcare responsibilities.
- ❖ **If you're on your own, do your best to social distance and disinfect.** First, remember: this is temporary. If you can, wear a mask and have your child wear a mask. Find creative ways to keep your child entertained from a safe distance and to show your love.
- ❖ **Depending on your circumstances, consider staying somewhere else.** If another adult in the household can care for your sick child, and the option is available to you, consider staying with a trusted family member or friend. (See text box, page 3.)
- ❖ **If you interacted closely with your child** in the two days before they were ill or while they were ill, follow precautions in case you were infected. Stay away from others as much as possible for 14 days.
- ❖ **Pay attention to your health** and call your doctor if you develop symptoms.
- ❖ **Every family's situation is unique.** Consider how best to care for your children while also protecting your health.

## What about if I'm the one to get COVID-19?

If you get COVID-19 and the rest of your household is not sick, take these steps:

- ❖ **Follow the recommendations above** (under “What should I do if my child gets COVID-19”) – they apply to adults too.
- ❖ **If possible, rely on another adult in the household** for childcare responsibilities.
- ❖ **If your child has an underlying health condition**, consider having them stay with a trusted family member or friend while you are ill.
- ❖ **Pay attention to your child's health** and call a doctor if they develop symptoms.

**If someone in your home is sick, you may need help from a trusted family member or friend.**

Make sure the helper:

- ✓ Is at low risk of serious illness. Do not choose someone who's 60 or older, has an underlying health issue, or is pregnant.
- ✓ Does not have housemates in high-risk categories.
- ✓ Is able to stay home and away from others for 14 days after they finish helping you. The helper should pay attention to their health and call their doctor if they develop symptoms.

## Can I keep breastfeeding my baby if I have COVID-19?

Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for most infants. However, much is unknown about COVID-19. Talk to your doctor about whether to start or continue breastfeeding, and then decide what's best for your family.

If you breastfeed while ill, take steps to avoid spreading the virus: wash your hands before touching your baby and wear a mask if you have one. If it's possible to express milk with a pump, consider having someone who's healthy feed the baby. Be sure to wash your hands before touching a pump or bottle parts, and wash all pumping equipment after each use.

## How long will it take to recover?

Most people with mild cases of COVID-19 recover within one to two weeks. A sick person can rejoin household activities after at least seven days have passed since symptoms started AND 3 days (72 hours) after they have recovered. Recovery means being fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medication, and seeing an improvement in symptoms.

Anyone who has been in close contact with a sick person should **stay home and away from others for 14 days**. During this time, they should pay attention to their health and call their doctor if they develop any symptoms.

If you need to take time off from work due to illness, you may be able to benefit from [Paid Family and Medical Leave](#).

## How can I talk with my child about COVID-19?

Illness can be scary for kids, especially when it separates them from the people they love. Reassure your child that they will get better soon. Listen to their concerns and remain calm and comforting. Here are just a few resources to help get the conversation started:

- ❖ [Showing Up For Our Kids During the Outbreak](#) (Public Health Insider)
- ❖ [How to Talk to Your Kids About Coronavirus](#) (PBS Kids for Parents)
- ❖ [Talking to Children About Coronavirus](#) (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry)
- ❖ [How to Talk to Your Child About Coronavirus Disease 2019, COVID-19](#) (UNICEF)
- ❖ [Speaking Up Against Racism Around the New Coronavirus](#) (Teaching Tolerance)

## Additional Resources

- ❖ [What to Do If You Are Sick](#) (CDC)
- ❖ [Caring for Someone at Home](#) (CDC)
- ❖ [Preventing COVID-19 Spread in Homes](#) (CDC)
- ❖ [COVID-19](#) (Public Health), including translated resources
- ❖ [2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak](#) (DOH)
- ❖ [Make a Plan](#) (CDC)

For CDC coronavirus materials in other languages, visit the [CDC Print Resources page](#). Web information is also available in [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Vietnamese](#), and [Korean](#).