

COVID-19 and Children

Background

COVID-19 is a viral illness caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. It is spread through respiratory droplets when in close contact with someone who is infected. Based on current evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults.

This virus can often cause a mild illness, with symptoms like those of the common cold. It can also cause more severe illness, with symptoms like pneumonia (infection of the lungs). Older adults and those who have chronic medical conditions are more susceptible to severe illness. COVID-19 tends to cause milder illness in children.

Most people who become ill with a coronavirus recover at home without need for medical care. No antiviral medications are available yet for the treatment of COVID-19, and a vaccine has not yet been developed.

COVID-19 Symptoms in Children

While many children are asymptomatic or only have mild illness, watch for any of the following symptoms:



FEVER
(TEMPERATURE
OF 37.8°C OR
GREATER)

**NEW OR
WORSENING
COUGH**

**SHORTNESS OF
BREATH**

**SORE THROAT
OR DIFFICULTY
SWALLOWING**

**ALTERED
SENSE OF
TASTE**

**NAUSEA/VOMITING,
DIARRHEA,
ABDOMINAL PAIN**

**RUNNY NOSE OR
NASAL
CONGESTION
UNRELATED TO
SEASONAL
ALLERGIES, POST
NASAL DRIP ETC.**

Other symptoms of COVID-19 can include:

- Unexplained fatigue, malaise or myalgia (tiredness, feeling unwell or muscle aches)
- Worsening of chronic conditions
- Chills
- Headaches
- Croup
- Pink eye
- Red/purple discolouration to hands, fingers, feet and/or toes, and skin may peel (COVID-toes)
- Lethargy
- Difficulty feeding in infants

If your child has any symptoms of COVID-19:

- They should self-isolate. Your child **should not** go to school.
- Your child should be tested for COVID-19 at an assessment centre. Assessment centre hours and locations can be found at wdgpublichealth.ca.
- If your child's test is positive, WDG Public Health will contact you to find out if your child has had any close contacts that may also need to self-isolate.

Inflammatory Illness in Children

There is a rare, but serious inflammatory illness that has occurred in a small number of children globally. It is thought to be associated with COVID-19 and includes symptoms suggestive of an illness called Kawasaki disease. This illness usually occurs weeks after COVID-19 infection. Researchers believe that symptoms may be a delayed immune response to the virus.

- Some children develop symptoms such as persistent fever, severe stomach pain and gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and a rash, pink eye, and red/purple discolouration to hands, fingers, feet and/or toes, and skin may peel (COVID-toes).
- If you think your child has any of these symptoms, make sure to seek advice from your child's health care provider.
- You should take your child to the hospital right away if they have any of the following symptoms:
 - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - Bluish skin colour
 - Not drinking enough fluids
 - Not waking up or not interacting
 - Being so irritable that your child does not want to be held

How to Protect Yourself from COVID-19

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Sneeze and cough into a tissue or your elbow/sleeve
- Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth
- Practice physical distancing (by staying 2-metres or 6-feet apart from people outside your family)
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Stay home if you are sick
- Wear a two-layer, non-medical, cloth mask or face covering where required or where physical distancing is hard. When using a non-medical mask/face covering, remember:
 - Medical masks should be left for health care providers
 - Do not share your mask/face covering with other people
 - Masks/face coverings should not be put on children under the age of two
 - People who have trouble breathing should not wear a mask/face covering
 - Online instructions can show you how to make a mask/face covering at home. Many online and in-store retailers offer cloth masks for sale at reasonable prices.



How to Talk to your Child about COVID-19

- It is important to take an honest approach when talking to your child to make sure they have accurate information about the pandemic.
- Use language that is age-appropriate.
- Let your child know that many health care providers and scientific experts are working hard to keep us safe and healthy.
- Validate your child's concerns and feelings by letting your child know that you understand that they miss their friends or that they are feeling scared. You can let them know you will be there for them whenever they need you or when they have questions or concerns.



- Some children may regress with certain skills. For example, a child may start asking for help getting dressed or a younger child may have more tantrums or show aggression. You can respond in a caring manner, and you can try to distract or redirect them.
- Limit exposure to news and media as this can increase anxiety for both children and parents. When tuning into news, choose a reliable news source.
- Find creative ways to keep in touch with family and friends and maintain daily routines.
- It is important for parents and caregivers to role model healthy coping skills and self-care. You can do this by making sure you get enough sleep, eat a nutritious diet and exercise daily.
- If you or your child are having challenges coping during this time, reach out to your health care provider, the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) or [Kids Help Phone](#) for support.

Immunizations During COVID-19

Although there currently is no vaccine that protects against COVID-19, it is still important to make sure children are protected from other vaccine-preventable diseases. While vaccines provided through schools may be delayed, it is still important that you talk to your health care provider about staying up-to-date on other routine vaccines for infants and children.

- **Routine Vaccines: Infants & Children**

- 2-, 4- and 6-month vaccines (pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio, pneumococcal and rotavirus)
- 12- and 15-month vaccines (meningococcal, pneumococcal, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella)
- 18-month vaccines (pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio)

- **Routine Vaccines: Adolescents & Adults**

- Boosters and catch-up vaccines can be given if you are seeing your health care provider for other urgent issues
- Seasonal influenza vaccines when available (fall 2020)



References

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