

Talking to Children About COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

A Parent Resource

The current coronavirus, abbreviated COVID-19, is causing an outbreak of respiratory (lung) disease. It was first detected in China and has now been detected internationally.

Concern over this new virus can make children and families anxious. While we don't know to what extent the disease may spread here in the United States (U.S.), we do know that it is contagious, that the severity of illness can vary from individual to individual, and that there are steps we can take to prevent the spread of infection.

Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. Helping children cope with anxiety requires providing accurate prevention information and facts without causing undue alarm.

It is very important to remember that children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events. If parents seem overly worried, children's anxiety may rise. Parents should reassure children that adults and officials are working hard to ensure that people stay healthy. Children will also need factual, age appropriate information about the potential seriousness of disease risk and concrete instruction about how to avoid infections and spread of the disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

Suggested Guidelines for Parents

- Remain calm and reassuring.
 - Children will react to and follow your verbal and nonverbal reactions. What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your children's anxiety.
 - If true, emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine and that you and other health officials are working to keep everyone safe.
 - Let your children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into the appropriate perspective.
- Monitor television viewing and social media.
 - Limit television viewing or access to information on the Internet and through social media. Try to avoid watching or listening to information that might be upsetting when your children are present. **Be aware that developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety for children.**
 - Speak to your child about how many stories about COVID-19 on the Internet may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.
 - Talk to your child about factual information of this disease—this can help reduce anxiety.
 - Keep to a regular schedule, as this can be reassuring and promotes physical health.
- Be honest and accurate.

- Don't ignore their concerns, but rather explain that at the present moment very few people in this country are sick with COVID-19.
- Use age appropriate and accurate information when explaining the COVID-19 virus, methods of spreading the virus, and the increase in concern around it. Reassure children that all precautions are taken for prevention and to ensure everyone remains safe.
- Know the symptoms of COVID-19.
 - The CDC believes these symptoms appear in a few days after being exposed to someone with the disease or as long as 14 days after exposure:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness for breath
 - For some people the symptoms are like having a cold; for others they are quite severe or even life threatening. In either case it is important to check with your child's healthcare provider (or yours) and follow instructions about staying home or away from public spaces to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices for protection.
 - Encourage your child to practice every day good hygiene—simple steps to prevent spread of illness:
 - Wash hands multiple times a day for at least 20 seconds
 - Cover their (and your) mouth with a tissue when they (or you) sneeze or cough and throw away the tissue immediately. If no tissue is available sneeze or cough into the bend of their (or your) elbow.
 - Do not share food or drinks.
 - Do not allow strangers or those who may be ill to touch young children (especially those under 24 months).
 - Practice giving fist or elbow bumps instead of handshakes. Fewer germs are spread this way.
 - Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent infection gives them a greater sense of control over disease spread and will help to reduce their anxiety.

For additional factual information contact your school nurse, ask your doctor, or check <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

