

Coronavirus infections and children

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Many parents are wondering how the coronavirus that is circulating around the world and is now present in the United States will impact their children, and the family. We will attempt to address some of the most questions asked by parents, patients and health care workers.

What do we know about COVID-19?

The disease caused by this new coronavirus is best known as COVID-19. The virus that causes COVID-19 is called SARS-CoV-2. This infection was first described in China in December 2019. That is where the "19" comes from, the year when first described. This viral infection quickly spread throughout China, and now it is spreading throughout the world. Many cases have now been described in the U.S. Sadly, infections by this virus have resulted in the deaths of several individuals with severe disease. Severe or critical disease where the person's lungs and other organs fail is the most common risk factor for death. This mostly occurs in older individuals, especially those over 70-80 years of age. While these cases are tragic, over 80 percent of people infected by this virus will have an infection with no symptoms or mild illness. Mild illness consists mostly of symptoms similar to those of a common cold.

While there are many coronaviruses that circulate around the world that are known to common colds and at times pneumonia, SARS-CoV-2 is completely different and is responsible for the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Have infections been described in children?

Yes, but infections have been rare in children. In an analysis of 70,000 infected with this virus, less than 1 percent [less than 1 child out of 100 persons infected] affected children under the age of 9 years of age. Infections in older children and adolescents was just a bit higher. Most of the infections reported in children have been mild or without symptoms. When ill, most children will have fever, cough, and tiredness. Most children will be better within a week. Preliminary reports out of China show that children rarely develop pneumonia, and rarely need to be admitted to the hospital. Those few children who have developed pneumonia have fared well. There have been no reported deaths in children up to this date. In summary, if a child is infected with this virus, they are likely to have no disease or a mild one. However, infected children can carry and shed the virus from the nose and throat and spread it to others, especially adults, who are more likely to develop symptoms and possibly severe disease.

How is SARS-CoV-19 transmitted?

This virus is mostly transmitted by coming in contact with people who are shedding the virus. It can be someone with or without symptoms. Secretions or respiratory droplets can contaminate hard surfaces and the hands of people. The virus can survive on hard surfaces for many days. Coughing can result in the spread of the virus.

Are there any treatments available to treat COVID-19 in children?

The answer is no. We currently have no medicines that can treat COVID-19 patients. The treatment is supportive.

How can I keep my child healthy?

Covering your cough by coughing into an elbow and proper hand hygiene is the most effective means of preventing the spread of this virus. Hand hygiene can be done using hand sanitizer containing alcohol or by using water and soap for 20 seconds. Using appropriate amounts and time will help prevent the spread of the virus in the house and elsewhere. Wearing a surgical mask will not reduce the risk of contracting the virus. Only those with symptoms should wear a mask. Wiping down surfaces in home and areas where people with respiratory illness will also

prevent illness through the contact with contaminated surfaces. Most household disinfectants can effectively kill the virus.

What should I do to keep my child, myself, and family healthy and free of COVID-19?

As COVID-19 continues to spread in the community, contact with health care facilities will certainly increase your and your child's chances of being exposed to the virus. If your child is doing well at home, routine follow-up visits to your child's doctor should be rescheduled. If your child is having any type of symptoms, you should call your primary health care professional before leaving your home to determine if your child needs to be seen. This is particularly important when your child has minor symptoms such as a fever and cough, or an illness resembling a common cold. If your child has minor symptoms, it is better to stay home and not visit the emergency room.

Does my child need testing if COVID-19 is suspected?

If your child is well and with minor symptoms, your child is better off staying at home and no testing is needed. This should remain the case for now. You should not bring your child to the hospital just to be tested. You would be putting your child, and yourself, at risk of acquiring the infection. Because there are limited test kits available at the moment, testing is currently reserved for persons that require hospital admission. Once more test kits become available and testing is being done more widespread in the community, then persons with mild symptoms may be tested. Health authorities will notify healthcare providers when this can happen.

When should I go to the clinic or emergency room?

If your child is experiencing high fevers that are difficult to control with acetaminophen and/or ibuprofen, you should talk to their primary care provider. Any time your child is having difficulty breathing, vomiting and not keeping down fluids, it is time to seek help and visit a health care facility close to home. The health care team will decide if your child needs to be tested for SARS-CoV-2 and/or other respiratory viruses.

If my child has a chronic condition, do I need to worry more?

Most of items discussed above are still relevant for your child. Consulting with your child's specialist is the right thing to do if you have questions.

Can my child go on vacation with the family?

Right now, COVID-19 is being reported from many countries around the world. Travel is ill-advised to certain countries such as Iran, Republic of Korea, Italy, Japan, and China. More countries may be added to this list in the future. With more infections reported around the world, there is a higher risk of catching the virus while flying on a crowded plane and visiting a busy airport. It is preferred at this time to not schedule any new travels in the next few months, as to get a better feel of the true magnitude of infections in most countries. Travel by car in the U.S. is the safest mode of travel right now. At this moment, travel on cruise ships is not recommended.

We hope that this letter finds you well and provides some of the information you need to keep your child and family healthy during this time of great concern. We are always available to answers questions as needed.

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