

What Does the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Mean for Families?

A new viral illness called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was discovered in China in December 2019.

Lessons learned from China and similar viral diseases can help families prepare for spread in the US. How children in the US will be affected is still mostly unknown. So far, proportionately fewer children have gotten sick in China, and the effects on them have mostly been mild. It is important for families to prepare for spread in the US.

Who Is at Risk?

COVID-19 appears to be spread via respiratory secretions when infected people cough or sneeze, similar to how influenza (flu) spreads. Currently, people at risk for COVID-19 include those who have been in close contact with infected people within 14 days before their symptoms began. The average time from when persons are exposed to signs of illness is about 5 days and can range from 2 to 14 days. People with COVID-19 have fever, cough, muscle aches, headache, and diarrhea, which are all symptoms similar to other viral infections, such as the flu. People who need hospitalization usually have severe pneumonia. Currently, there are no treatments or vaccines available.

What Should Families Do to Prepare?

Talk to your children about how you are keeping them safe from COVID-19. Answer them in an open and honest way and try to manage any stress you may be feeling. Continue with your normal routine as much as possible. Be careful about rumors spreading in social media. Follow trusted sites (<https://www.cdc.gov/>) and news sources to learn about how your community is responding to COVID-19. Limit your children's exposure to media.

Ask community leaders about plans for school closures and cancelling group events if COVID-19 is widespread. Talk to your workplace about teleworking options, and parents of students can ask about internet-based educational opportunities. Store at least a 2-week supply of food, water, and necessities such as diapers and refill your prescription medications and special equipment. Stock up on fever reducers (eg, acetaminophen [Tylenol]) and oral rehydration solutions (eg, Pedialyte).

Importantly, teach children good handwashing techniques (using soap and water for at least 20 seconds) or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wash surfaces regularly with household cleaners. Children should be taught to cough or sneeze into their arm or elbow, not their hands, and to avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. Keep children away from people who are sick. If your child gets sick, keep them home and call ahead to your physician to ask about next steps. Do not go to

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a viral respiratory illness that can cause symptoms of fever, cough, muscle aches, headache, and diarrhea. Some patients with COVID-19 develop pneumonia and may need to be hospitalized.

Some actions to prevent transmission of COVID-19 include



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth



Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds



Cough or sneeze into your arm or elbow



Sanitize surfaces regularly



Avoid persons who are sick



Stay home if you have a fever or respiratory symptoms



If your child has a fever or respiratory symptoms, contact your child's physician before going to the clinic or hospital.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

an emergency department unless you are having an emergency. If someone in your family becomes sick with COVID-19, follow guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to decrease the chance of spreading.

Precautions for Children With Special Health Care Needs

Children with special health care needs, especially those with immune or neuromuscular problems, or with chronic illnesses, such as asthma, diabetes, or cancer, might be more likely to have complications from COVID-19. They might need to avoid crowds or large gatherings more than other children.

Authors: Lindsay A. Thompson, MD, MS; Sonja A. Rasmussen, MD, MS

Published Online: March 13, 2020. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0828

Author Affiliations: Department of Pediatrics, University of Florida College of Medicine, Gainesville (Thompson, Rasmussen); Department of Health Outcomes and Biomedical Informatics, University of Florida College of Medicine, Gainesville (Thompson); Department of Epidemiology, University of Florida College of Public Health and Health Professions and College of Medicine, Gainesville (Rasmussen).

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.

The JAMA Pediatrics Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA Pediatrics*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your child's medical condition, *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests that you consult your child's physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, email reprints@jamanetwork.com.