

What Parents Should Know about Coronavirus

Here's how to protect your family.

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With coronavirus updates in the news daily, it's not surprising you may feel confused (and maybe nervous) about what it means for your family. But if you're in good health in general, experts say there's no need to be overly concerned. "More than 80 percent of people who get coronavirus only experience mild symptoms, and they go on to have a full recovery," says Daniel Hart, MD, Medical Director of Infectious Diseases and Travel Medicine at Summit Medical Group/City MD. "Older people and those with serious medical conditions are at higher risk."

At present, the risk of becoming ill is low for most of us. As of March 3, 2020, there are fewer than 100 cases of coronavirus (<https://www.summitmedicalgroup.com/news/smg-news/coronavirus-faq/>), also called COVID-19, in the US, with two cases in New York (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/03/nyregion/coronavirus-new-york-state.html>) and zero cases in New Jersey. According to the CDC, there's also no evidence that kids are more susceptible (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/children-faq.html>) to the virus (in most cases in China, it's been reported primarily in adults). Reports from China say when kids do get sick, it's mostly mild cold-like symptoms such as fever, runny nose and cough.

Although there's currently no vaccine to prevent infection or antiviral drugs for treatment, healthy habits you'd use to avoid getting sick with colds or flu (<https://www.njfamily.com/flu-season-is-hitting-hard-in-nj-heres-how-to-protect-your-kids/>) are your best defense, says Hart. Here's what else experts recommend:

Get the facts. Don't rely on secondhand information or social media for updates. Log to reliable health information sites such as the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#protect>), the American Academy of Pediatrics (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>), the NJ Department of Health (<https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>) or the New York Department of Health (<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>).

Wash your hands (a lot). Clean up with soap and water frequently (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>), especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, or after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Teach your kids the right way to do it: Wet hands with running water; lather up with soap on the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails; scrub for two "Happy Birthday" songs; rinse with running water; and dry hands on a clean towel or air dry them.

Use sanitizer if you can't wash your hands. Use a sanitizer that's at least 60 percent alcohol (<https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/show-me-the-science-hand-sanitizer.html>). Apply to one palm (read the label to tell how much to use), then rub your hands together until fingers are dry.

Avoid close contact with sick people. According to the CDC, the virus is thought to spread mainly through respiratory drops (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>) when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It's believed symptoms show up from 2 to 14 days after exposure and include coughing, fever, and muscle pain and weakness.

Keep kids home when they're sick. That goes for you, too, mom and dad. If you or the kids have fever AND a cough or shortness of breath AND have traveled from China, Italy, South Korea, Iran and Japan in the last 14 days before symptoms or you've been in contact with a person who's been ill with confirmed coronavirus, call your doctor.

Don't use masks. It may seem like you're doing something to protect your family, but wearing a mask isn't currently recommended to prevent anyone from catching a respiratory disease, including coronavirus, says the CDC.

Clean surfaces. It's also possible that a person can get coronavirus by touching a surface that has the virus on it, then touching his or her own mouth, nose or eyes. Wipe down and disinfect frequently touched objects (keyboards, door knobs, counters, fridge handles) and surfaces using household cleaning spray or wipes.

Talk to your kid. Ask what your child has heard about the virus, which may or may not be accurate depending on where he or she got the information, says the University of Georgia (<https://news.uga.edu/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/>). Discuss what's going on in an age-appropriate way, sticking to the facts. With young kids who don't understand how germs spread, you may have to explain they're not going to get sick spontaneously. Help kids of all ages feel a sense of empowerment by explaining what everyone in the family can do to stay healthy, such as frequent handwashing and keeping hands off faces.