

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Care of Children with Symptoms of COVID-19

Recent updates

1/4/21: Updated quarantine guidance and resources for coping with stress.

11/6/20: Added resources on coping with stress. Updated information related infectiousness for children without symptoms and provided links to isolation and quarantine instructions.

WHAT THIS GUIDANCE COVERS

This guidance provides information on what it takes to protect your household if a child has COVID-19. It provides general information and then addresses three situations a family may face as they care for children with COVID-19. Sections of the document are:

1. **Steps to protect yourself and others in the household from infection**
2. **How to provide care for a child with mild or moderate symptoms.**
3. **What to do if your child develops more serious symptoms; how to recognize symptoms of serious illness and what steps you should take;**
4. **What to do if your child has special health care needs that either:**
 - **Place them at elevated risk of serious illness due to COVID-19, or**
 - **Make it more difficult to provide their care.**

1. STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM INFECTION

The risk to children from COVID-19 is much lower than the risk to adults. Children can catch the virus just like adults but are less likely to get very sick when they have it. This means that an important part of taking care of a child with COVID-19 is protecting others in your home from getting sick too. Be extra careful to avoid spread if your household includes anyone over age 65, anyone with a chronic health condition or disability, or anyone who is pregnant. See <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/people/GuidanceIndividualsDisabilitiesChronicConditions.pdf> for info about COVID-19 for people with chronic conditions and <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/people/GuidancePregnancy.pdf> for pregnancy.

Key steps to protect your family are:

- Focus on isolation. Your child must isolate at home until at least 10 days have passed since they showed symptoms or had a positive COVID-19 test AND at least one day after their fever is gone (without use of fever-reducing medicines) and their symptoms have gotten better. Your child should stay in their own room. If they don't have their own room, choose a part of the house where they can be separated from other people.
 - Use a screen or hang a sheet to put a barrier between your child and other household members.
- Have your child use a separate bathroom. If that is not possible, make sure the bathroom is disinfected after your child uses it. See <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/protection/CleaningInfographic.pdf> to learn how to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the home.
- If your child is over two and does not have any breathing problems, they need to wear a medical mask any time they are around others (including you).
 - Children under 2 should never wear a mask.

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- Children 2-8 may wear a mask with adult supervision as long as the child does not have a condition that makes breathing hard.
- Teach your child to use a tissue to cover a sneeze or cough and then throw it in the trash. Teach them to sneeze or cough into an elbow if they don't have a tissue.
- Use disposable plates and utensils for your child's meals if you can. If not, make sure plates, cups and utensils are washed in a dishwasher or with dish soap and hot water right after use. If using a dishwasher, they don't have to be washed separately.
- Other ways to protect household members are:
 - Limit your child's care to a single care giver. Other household members can help in other ways, but it is best if only one person is regularly exposed to your child. The caregiver should have a medical mask (not just a cloth face covering) and wear gloves while touching the child or handling their toys, bedding, dishes, and so on.
 - Regular handwashing is key for a caregiver who is in and out of your child's room even if they use gloves. The caregiver should not touch their own face, eyes, nose, or mouth unless their hands were just washed.
- Your child's caregiver and anyone else who had close contact with your child while they were infectious, must self-quarantine at home and monitor their health for 10 days. Quarantine starts after your child's isolation ends. Their quarantine can end after 10 days if they never had any symptoms and if they monitor their health and are extra careful with regular COVID-19 precautions from Day 11 through Day 14.
 - Regular precautions include wearing a face covering at all times the caregiver is around others, keeping 6 feet away from others, and frequent hand washing. The caregiver should get tested for COVID-19 to check if they are infected. They will still need to quarantine for 10 days even if they test negative. This is because the virus could show up at the end of the quarantine period.
- The infectious period is the time during which your child can spread the virus to others. It begins two days before symptoms started and lasts until your child's isolation period ends. If your child has COVID-19 but does not have any symptoms, the infectious period starts two days before their test was taken and ends 10 days later. Anyone who had close contact with your child during this time must quarantine.

These steps are very important even if your child does not have symptoms. Remember, a child with no symptoms who has tested positive can spread it to others and that your child needs you to be healthy so you can take care of them. You are helping your child when you protect yourself from the virus. See the Home Isolation Instructions (ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation) and the Home Quarantine Instructions (ph.lacounty.gov/covidquarantine) for more info.

2. HOW TO CARE FOR A CHILD WITH MILD OR MODERATE SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms of COVID-19 in children may include: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, feeling tired, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, congestion or runny nose, new loss of taste or smell, and poor appetite or poor feeding, especially in babies under one year old. This list of symptoms is not complete and can include others not listed.
- Please talk to your child's doctor about testing and isolation for any other symptoms that concern you.

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- Pay attention to a fever even if you don't see other symptoms.
 - **If your child is under 3 months** and has a fever, call your doctor right away. If it's nighttime, call the emergency number for your doctor or clinic. Any fever can be serious in a newborn.
 - **If your child is between 3 months and 3 years** and has a fever over 102.2°F, call your child's doctor.
 - **If your child is over 3** and has a fever over 102.2°F, use your judgment. If they seem sick in other ways – they look sick and are less active than normal – you may want to call their doctor.
 - If you don't have a thermometer, you can judge temperature by feeling your child's forehead. You won't get a number, but you can tell if your child feels hotter than normal.
- Call your child's doctor when you see (or if your child says they have) any of the symptoms of COVID-19.
 - The doctor can help you judge whether the symptoms sound like COVID-19.
 - The doctor may give you advice over the phone since an office visit isn't needed to treat symptoms of mild COVID-19 infection. Visiting could also place your child and others in the office at risk.
 - Schedule a telehealth visit if you would like the doctor to see your child or hear how they cough.
- Caring for a child with mild symptoms of COVID-19 is a lot like caring for a child with a bad cold.
 - Keep your child comfortable. Make sure the room they are in is not too hot or too cold.
 - Make sure your child is not overdressed and in extra warm bedding. A young child can overheat easily.
 - Make sure your child gets a lot of rest.
 - Your child does not have to be in bed all the time, but they should not be too active. Try to keep them away from other family members whether or not they are in bed.
 - Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol or a generic brand) if they have pain or are feeling feverish. Be sure to follow the label instructions.
 - Do not use other over-the-counter medicines unless your doctor tells you to.
 - Make sure your child gets lots of fluids. Staying hydrated is key.
 - Don't give a young child sports drinks or other sugary beverages. Sugar in those drinks can cause diarrhea and make dehydration worse.
 - Your child's doctor may recommend a special rehydration drink (with electrolytes) made for kids if they get diarrhea.
 - Keep your child hydrated with water, soup, popsicles and flavored gelatin. Avoid caffeine drinks like soda.
- Ask friends and neighbors to help you get through the isolation and quarantine period. They cannot visit, but they can drop off food, diapers, toys, books or games for your child and other things that you need.
 - Your child can't play with other children during this time but you can ask other families to have their children "visit" over the phone or online if your child gets lonely.

3. WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD HAS SERIOUS SYMPTOMS

Only a small number of children will need hospital care for COVID-19 compared to 20% of adults who get sick. Even so, it's important to know what serious symptoms might look like and to have a plan in place if it happens

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to your child. Below are basic rules to follow. Your child's doctor can help you work out more details about who to call and where to go.

- Children with special health care needs and those under age 1 are at higher risk of serious illness. Be in touch with your child's doctor and have a plan in place if symptoms show up in an infant.
- Any big change in the child's appearance or behavior is a warning.
- Exact symptoms to look out for are high fever, worsening shortness of breath (you may see your child's chest go up and down), confusion or sudden drowsiness. Call your child's doctor right away if you see any of these symptoms.
 - You might be able to continue caring for your child at home, but it's best to talk to their doctor and make sure your child does not need to go to the hospital.
- Call 911 if your child struggles to breathe, stops being able to walk or talk, begins to turn blue or has other serious symptoms. Tell the dispatcher how old your child is so they can send an ambulance with the right equipment. Let them know that your child has COVID-19 so the EMTs that come to help wear the right personal protective equipment.

4. WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD HAS SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

Children with significant medical needs

Children with special health care needs may be at higher risk of serious illness if they get COVID-19, especially if their condition involves impaired lung function or reduced immune function. Even if a condition does not affect breathing or immunity, medications and other factors related to care of a child's special health need may make COVID-19 care harder.

- The following are ways to help stop COVID-19 from entering your home:
 - If someone in your household must go outside the home to work each day, try to have them stay somewhere else. If your family can do this, it can lower the chance of that household member bringing COVID-19 into the home.
 - If you cannot do this, the household member should take extra steps to avoid getting infected. See <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/protection/CleaningInfographic.pdf> for more details.
 - Anyone who enters your home to care for your child should take extra precautions, especially washing their hands before caring for your child.
 - Try to isolate your child in a separate area that can be protected from contamination if there are people who come in and out of your home.
 - Try to limit your child's care to one household caregiver. This person should avoid going out of the home at any time if possible. They should be very careful to wash their hands every time they enter your child's area.
- Being ready ahead of time is important. Try to find a back-up caregiver who is trained to care for your child and will be able to care for them if you get sick. Planning will also help you and others care for your child should the child get infected.
 - Make sure you have an updated emergency plan for your child. It should have details on your child's condition/s and medical history, any medications they are taking, allergies and other contraindications, any medical equipment your child regularly uses/needs, and contact information for all of their doctors and specialists.

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- If your child does show symptoms of COVID-19, contact their primary doctor and key specialists right away.
 - While waiting to hear back from their physicians, you should assume that your child has COVID-19 and follow the guidance in [section 1](#).
 - Because your child's health conditions are unique, follow the advice of your child's specialists about any next steps.
 - If you are told to go to the doctor's office or hospital, they will tell you how to travel safely to lower the risk of exposing others to the virus.

Children with emotional, behavioral or developmental needs

If your child's special need is emotional, behavioral or developmental, your major challenges will probably have less to do with medical care and more to do with behavior changes needed for effective isolation of a child with COVID-19.

- Your first challenge may be finding out that your child is sick. Some children have a hard time recognizing their own physical sensations. Others may not know how to describe what they feel or that they feel sick at all. If this is true of your child, be sure to watch for signs of sickness.
 - See page 2 for a list of [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Be sure to also look out for fast breathing and low energy or less activity than is usual for your child.
 - Watch for clues in your child's behavior. For example, not wanting a food your child usually likes may mean they have a sore throat.
 - Your judgment, based on past experience with your child, will be key to figuring out that your child is sick and how it is affecting them.
- Once you have spotted the symptoms of COVID-19 and talked to your child's doctor, the next challenge will be organizing your home to protect other family members while your child recovers.
 - Your child may refuse to wear a mask. If this happens, wash their hands and have them stay at least 6 feet from other people. Remember, children under 2 should never wear a mask. Children 2-8 may wear a mask with adult supervision as long as the child does not have a condition that limits breathing.
 - Explain to them what COVID-19 is and why all these changes are needed in a way that they can understand. There are social stories offered online that may be helpful (see, for example: <https://www.autism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Feeling-Sick-COVID-19.pdf>).
 - Offer clear guidance about each of the behavioral changes needed to protect other household members. Online resources can help, or you can make up your own social story about handwashing, wearing a mask, etc.
- Follow the "[How to Care for a Child with Mild or Moderate Symptoms](#)" guidance in Section 2. Be sure to make changes as needed to accommodate your child's behavioral or developmental needs.
 - No-contact thermometers may not be as precise as other thermometers, but if they are less likely to upset your child, use them. A kiss on the forehead or a hand on the back of the neck to judge if your child has a fever also works, if that is all your child will allow.
 - Find a way to give medicine that works for your child if they won't tolerate pills or liquids. Try mashing medicines in food or using suppositories.

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- Set a schedule for daily activities so your child has structure and routine as they recover. It may help your child adjust to both preventive measures and medical care if they know these activities fit into a day that also has things they enjoy as well.

For all parents caring for children with COVID-19, be sure to TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. This means wearing a mask, using gloves as needed, and social distancing whenever you can as you care for your child. It also means having other household members take over household chores, asking friends or neighbors to pick up groceries for you, and staying in touch with your friends and family by phone or Internet.

COPING WITH STRESS

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH)'s [COVID-19 webpage](#) and the 211LA webpage 211la.org/resources/subcategory/mental-health have local resources to help with mental health & wellbeing concerns. LA County residents have free access to [Headspace Plus](#). This is a collection of mindfulness and meditation resources in English and Spanish. It also has movement and sleep exercises to help manage stress, fear, and anxiety related to COVID-19. Guidance and resources are also available on the CDC webpage, [Coping with Stress](#).

If you want to speak with someone about your mental health, contact your doctor or the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Access Center Helpline at 1-800-854-7771. This number is available 24/7. You can also text "LA" to 74174.

MORE USEFUL RESOURCES

- Go to <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/resources.htm> for a list of programs that offer help from food to libraries to mental health hotlines. You can also find services and resources by calling 2-1-1 or going to <https://www.211la.org/>
- Go to <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/> for guidance related to prevention and care of COVID-19. Guidance on use of face coverings is also helpful and can be found at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/protection/GuidanceClothFaceCoverings.pdf>.