

Parent & Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope with COVID-19

COVID-19 is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus that has not been found in people before. Coronaviruses are primarily spread through respiratory droplets. This means people generally have to be within six feet of someone who is contagious, and have droplets land on them, to become infected. Take these actions to reduce your risk of getting any viral respiratory infection:



Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



Avoid close contact with people who are sick.



Stay at home away from others if you are sick.



Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, then throw the tissue into the trash and wash your hands.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.



Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Many conditions can cause a person to be at higher risk. If you would like to learn more, please check out the following resources from the CDC:

- [6 Steps to Prevent COVID-19 \(Video\)](#)
- [How to Protect Yourself](#)
- [People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness](#)

Preparing Your Family for a Potential Infectious Disease Outbreak

Being prepared is one of the best ways to lessen the impact of an infectious disease outbreak like COVID-19 on your family. Here are some steps that you can take to be better prepared:

- Identify how you will keep up with the rapidly changing information on COVID-19. In rapidly changing health events and outbreaks such as COVID-19, there can be large amounts of incorrect or partially correct information that



can add to your stress and confusion as a parent/caregiver. Here are a few trusted sources of health information:

- [Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\)](#)
- [CDC](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- Plan how you want to discuss COVID-19 with your family. Be sure to include:
 - What the current disease outbreak is
 - How it is contracted
 - What are the possible dangers
 - Protective steps being taken in the community/nation/global community
 - Protective steps everyone in the family can take
- Hold your family discussion in a comfortable place and encourage family members to ask questions. Consider having a separate discussion with young children in order to use language they can understand, and to address specific fears or misconceptions they may have.
- Create a list of community resources that will be helpful during an outbreak. Make sure you know emergency telephone numbers, websites, and official social media accounts. Carver County Public Health has created several web pages to share resources with the community that may be helpful: www.co.carver.mn.us/COVID-19.
- Develop a plan for maintaining contact with friends and family members via telephone and internet in the event that isolation or quarantine is recommended.
- Check-in with your children's school about distance learning requirements that are offered during a school closure. Also, if your child receives additional services at school, ask how these will be handled during a closure (e.g., therapeutic services, meals).

Reducing Your Family's Risk: Hygiene, Medical Care & Supplies

- Have all family members practice [preventive behaviors](#), including washing hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, and staying home when sick.
- Keep basic health supplies on-hand, such as soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and a thermometer.
- Make sure you have a supply of any medications you take regularly.
- If your child takes medication for a chronic condition, talk with your child's healthcare provider about plans to get a supply at home that will last through any period of home isolation for your family.
- Have your family work together to gather items that might be needed during a pandemic. These include drinking water, nonperishable food, and cash. Be sure to include activities, books, and games for children in case a lengthy time at home is recommended. Remember to include batteries in your item list if those are needed for certain activities and games.



Carver County Public Health offers a variety of resources to help families prepare for large-scale disasters or public health emergencies, such as a disease pandemic. Visit our [Personal Health Preparedness](#) web page for more information.

Coping with the Stress of an Infectious Disease Pandemic like COVID-19

Even if your family is prepared, an outbreak can be very stressful. These recommendations can help your family cope with this stress.

Information & Communication

- Stay updated about what is happening with the outbreak and additional recommendations by getting information from credible media outlets, local public health authorities, and trusted public health websites.
- Seek support and continued connections from friends and family by talking to them on the telephone, texting, or communicating through email or social media. Schools may have additional ways to stay in contact with educators and classmates.
- Although you need to stay informed, minimize exposure to media outlets or social media that might promote fear or panic. Be particularly aware of (and limit) how much media coverage or social media time your children are exposed to about the outbreak.
- Email and texting may be the best way ways to stay in contact with others during an outbreak, as the internet may have the most sensational media coverage and may be spreading rumors. Check-in regularly with your children about what they have viewed on the internet and clarify any misinformation.
- Focus on supporting children by encouraging questions and helping them understand the current situation.
 - Talk about their feelings and validate these feelings.
 - Help them express their feelings through drawing or other activities.
 - Clarify misinformation or misunderstandings about how the virus is spread and that not every respiratory disease is COVID-19.
 - Provide comfort and a bit of extra patience.
 - Check back in with your children on a regular basis, or when the situation changes.



Scheduling & Activities

- Even if your family is isolated or quarantined, realize this will be temporary.
- Keep your family's schedule consistent when it comes to bedtimes, meals, and exercise.
- Make time to do things at home that have made you and your family feel better in other stressful situations, such as reading, watching movies, listening to music, playing games, exercising, or engaging in religious activities (e.g., prayer, participating in services via the internet).
- Have children participate in distance learning opportunities that are offered by their schools or other institutions/organizations.



- Recognize that feelings such as loneliness, boredom, fear of contracting disease, anxiety, stress, and panic are normal reactions to a stressful situation, such as a disease outbreak.
- Help your family engage in fun and meaningful activities consistent with your family and cultural values.

Hygiene & Medical Care

Find ways to encourage proper hygiene and health promoting behavior with your children (e.g., create drawings to remember family routines). Include them in household jobs or activities so they feel a sense of accomplishment. Provide praise and encouragement for engaging in household jobs and good hygiene.

- Reassure your children that you will take them to the pediatrician and get medical care if needed. Explain, however, that not every cough or sneeze means that they or others have COVID-19.

Self-Care & Coping

- Modify your daily activities to meet the current reality of the situation, and focus on what you can accomplish.
- Shift expectation and priorities to focus more on what gives you meaning, purpose, or fulfillment. Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation.
- Attempt to control self-defeating statements, and replace them with more helpful thoughts.
- Remember, you are a role model for your children. How you handle this stressful situation can affect how your children manage their worries.



- If your family has experienced a serious illness or the death of a loved one, find ways to support each other.
 - Reach out to your friends and family, talking to them about the death of your loved one. Use telephone, email, or social media to communicate if necessary.
 - Find ways to honor the death of your loved one. Some activities may be done as a family, while additional activities may be done individually.
 - Seek religious/spiritual help or professional counseling for support. This may be available online or by telephone during an outbreak.

Helping Children Cope

Your children may respond differently to an outbreak, depending on their age. Below are some reactions according to the age group, and the best ways you can respond.

Age Group	Reactions	How to Help
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being alone, bad dreams • Speech difficulties • Loss of bladder/bowel control, constipation, bed-wetting • Change in appetite • Increased temper tantrums, whining, or clinging behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience and tolerance • Provide reassurance (verbal and physical) • Encourage expression through play, story-telling • Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements • Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime • Maintain regular family routines • Avoid media exposure
School-Age (ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability, whining, aggressive behavior • Clinging, nightmares • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) • Withdrawal from peers, loss of interest • Competition for parent's attention • Forgetfulness about chores and new information learned at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Play sessions and staying in touch with friends through telephone and internet • Regular exercise and stretching • Engage in educational activities (workbooks, games) • Participate in structured household chores • Set gentle but firm limits • Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions. Include what is being done in the family and community. • Encourage expression through play and conversation • Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard • Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation
Adolescent (ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms (headaches, stomach aches) • Sleep/appetite disturbance • Agitation or decrease in energy, apathy • Ignoring health promotion behaviors • Isolating from peers and loved ones • Concerns about stigma and injustices • Avoiding/cutting schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience, tolerance, and reassurance • Encourage continuation of routines • Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force) • Stay in touch with friends through telephone, internet, video games • Participate in family routines, including chores; supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors • Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard • Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

Source: [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

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