

COVID-19: FAQ for Parents and Caregivers of Pre-School and School-Age Children

1. What is social distancing and why is it so important?

Social distancing involves staying home and creating space between you and others. Staying at least 6 feet away from other people will help slow the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and protect those most at risk of serious illness. In other words, social distancing protects you, your family and those in your community.

2. How can I protect myself and family members from COVID-19?

Follow these steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and teach children to do the same:

- Stay at home if you are sick. Keep children who are sick at home as well.
- Even if you feel well and have no symptoms, avoid all events, travel or interactions. Stay at home as much as you can.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hands.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead, wave.
- Monitor your health and your family's health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
- Create more personal space between yourself and others. This is called social distancing.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects (such as tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) using a regular household cleaning spray or disinfecting wipes.
- Make sure to keep cleaning products away from young children — up high and out of reach. If a child is exposed to a potential poison, call the Poison Control Center at 212-POISONS.
- Open windows to improve ventilation. Make sure windows have properly installed window guards. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **window guards**.

3. Is it OK for my child to go on a playdate or go to a friend's house if nobody feels sick?

- No. All nonessential gatherings of individuals of any size and for any reason are temporarily banned. **Playdates are not allowed at this time.**

4. Where can we find child care if our child's school or child care center have closed?

- If you must go out, seek care from a reliable family member or friend that is not sick. Avoid asking grandparents, other older adults, or people who have underlying health conditions (such as chronic lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system), as they are most at risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Children of certain essential employees, such as first responders, health care professionals and others working to meet the public health and safety needs of the city, may be able to place children with the New York City Department of Education's Regional Enrichment Centers. For more information, visit <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enrollment-help/regional-enrichment-centers>.

5. Is it OK to spend time outdoors?

- Yes. Go outdoors with your children — the fresh air and change of scenery is good for you and them. But avoid activities that involve other children and families, as it is especially hard for children who love to hug, tag and tumble with friends, to keep a safe distance.
- It's important for health and well-being to have active time every day. Here are some steps you can take to keep children and adults active but safe:
 - Continue to practice social distancing, keeping at least 6 feet between your family and others.
 - Avoid contact sports and playgrounds. Engage in activities that allow social distancing, such as walking and bicycling.
 - Use of playground equipment is not permitted at this time.
 - Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Carry hand sanitizer so that if you or other family members touch common surfaces like door handles and railings, you can clean your hands. Upon returning home, be sure to wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

6. How should we talk to our children about COVID-19?

- Try to keep information simple and remind them that many people are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.
- Give children information that is honest and accurate in a way that is appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Remain calm and reassuring. Remember children react to both what you say and how you say it. They pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and others.
- Make yourself available to listen and to talk. Let children know they can come to you when they have questions.
- Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma. Viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of race, ethnicity or country of origin. Avoid making assumptions about

who might have COVID-19. Misinformation about COVID-19 can create fear and hatred that harms people and makes it harder to keep everyone healthy.

- Reduce the amount of exposure to media focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

7. Can teens spend time together?

- Talk to your teens to make sure they understand the importance of not gathering with friends at this time. Explain that staying at home and not spending time in groups will help slow the spread of COVID-19, protecting them, their family and friends, and our communities. Explain how social distancing is important, even if they and their friends feel healthy.
- Encourage teens to stay in touch with friends through phone, social media, and video chat apps.
- Encourage teens who are symptom-free and without underlying health conditions to spend time outdoors, while practicing social distancing.
 - Walking, running, and bicycling are good examples of activities that do not require close contact with others or shared equipment.

8. Is it OK to leave children home alone without supervision?

- Each family needs to decide when it is appropriate to leave their child alone, as all children develop at their own rate with their own needs and abilities. Consider the child's maturity, comfort with the situation, their knowledge and ability, and the circumstances if they are left alone.
- Make sure that food is available for the child and that there is a way for them to reach you or another trusted adult.
- Ask a trusted neighbor who is not sick to check on children old enough to stay home alone. If possible, the neighbor should call the child instead of going to the door. Avoid asking neighbors who are older or who have underlying health conditions to watch children, as they are most at risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- Remind children who are home alone that they should not have any visitors or leave the house, except for safe exercise (such as walking and biking at a distance from others).

9. How can you help your family cope with the stress of the COVID-19 outbreak?

- The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful for you, the children you are caring for and your family. Fear and anxiety about a disease can cause strong emotions in adults and children. It is natural for you and your family to feel overwhelmed, sad, anxious and afraid, or to experience other symptoms of distress, such as trouble sleeping. It's important to support and protect children's emotional well-being.

- Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations and this can vary greatly depending on your age. What’s most important to help children cope with this stress is the support and caring you and other caregivers can provide. Children’s well-being depends on your well-being so it’s important you do what you can to take care of yourself. To reduce your stress and to manage the situation, try to remain positive, remind yourself of your strengths, connect with friends and loved ones using technology (such as social media, texting, video chat apps like Skype and FaceTime), and use healthy coping skills.

Family Resources

- For the latest information, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus or cdc.gov/covid19. For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Text "COVIDESP" to 692-692 for updates in Spanish. Messages and data rates may apply.
- For food safety tips and ideas for cooking with kids, visit eatright.org and search for **make the most of your time at home**.
- For a parent/caregiver guide to helping families cope with COVID-19, visit nctsn.org and search for **helping families cope with COVID-19**.
- For free resources including eBooks, audiobooks, e-magazines, songs, movies, videos, virtual story times, and remote homework help and tutoring, visit the NYC libraries websites at bklynlibrary.org, nypl.org and queenslibrary.org.
- For information about how to talk to young children about coronavirus and tips for parents on how to make a new routine at home, visit pbs.org/parents/thrive/schools-closed-how-to-make-a-new-home-routine.
- For guidance on helping children cope with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak, visit who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf.
- For free workout videos, family activities, and wellness tips, visit ymcanyc.org/ymca-home.
- For tips for families with young children (newborn to three), visit zerotothree.org and search for **tips for families coronavirus**.
- If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or chat online by visiting nyc.gov/nycwell.
 - You can also visit nyc.gov/nycwell and click on their [App Library](#) to find apps and online tools to help you manage your health and emotional well-being from home.
 - If you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, contact NYC Well or call **911** immediately.