

How to Navigate COVID-19 with Your Kids

Regardless of their age and their stage, we worry about our children, even more so now as we continue to navigate our way through the COVID-19 global pandemic. As parents and guardians, we are additionally challenged by the staggering amount of information available to us through the web and news, much of which changes quickly.



According to Derek Trapasso, MD, Director of the [MassGeneral for Children Pediatric Hospitalist Program at Norwood Hospital](#), taking a few steps back can help your family put in place strategies to ensure longer term health. The following information is from best practices from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control. For the most up-to-date information or for specific questions or concerns about your child, please contact your pediatrician or family medicine practitioners directly.

1. **STAY HEALTHY: Understanding the impact COVID-19 can have on young children, adolescents and teenagers is tentative at best. Focus first on maintaining safety and physical health for you and your family.**

- a. Know the symptoms of COVID-19. They can be wide ranging, and include fever, cough, sore throat, or even rashes and gastrointestinal symptoms. While the vast majority of children will tolerate the symptoms well, contact your child's doctor with any questions or concerns.
- b. Stopping the spread is the key for all of us. That means social distancing and practicing good hand hygiene with your family including:
 - i. when cooking or getting meals ready;
 - ii. before eating;
 - iii. whenever caring for someone who's sick;
 - iv. after using the bathroom;
 - v. after coughing, blowing your nose, or sneezing;
 - vi. after touching the garbage; and,
 - vii. after changing diapers or helping a child use the bathroom.
- c. Washing hands correctly is as important as remembering to wash them in the first place. Steps include:
 - i. wet your hands and use soap;
 - ii. lather all the surfaces of your hands, fingers, and nails;
 - iii. scrub for at least 20 seconds (two rounds of the Happy Birthday song);
 - iv. rinse well; and,
 - v. dry thoroughly (with a clean towel or air dry).

2. **KEEP A REGULAR ROUTINE: Struggling with distance learning, balancing work schedules and home responsibilities and supporting your family while they stay-at-home can be exhausting. A regular routine can be critical in helping everyone in your household manage their health and well-being. Strategies include:**

- a. Have a daily plan. Set up that plan the night before or at the beginning of the week.
- b. Have time allotted for learning, exercise and play.
- c. Remember healthy eating, with nutritious meals and snacks.
- d. Schedule family time. This could include playing, reading, eating or watching a movie.
- e. Keep a regular bedtime routine. Try and keep it to around the same time each day.

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3. SCREEN TIME: Before COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders, managing screen time may have already been a struggle. While it is important to be forgiving of yourself and your kids, screen and on-line time check-ins and rules can help promote health and well-being for every member of your family. Remember:

- a.** Maintain limits on screen time. Screen time has increased, particularly for middle school and older children, who still need active play and outdoor time.
- b.** Get and follow advice from teachers.
- c.** Watch for quality content by using media together with your kids.
- d.** Try not to have the news on all day. It can be overwhelming and upsetting for children to have a constant background of “negative news”.

4. ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS: COVID-19 is unprecedented in our lifetime and, our children’s reactions are not well documented or even understood at this time. Active listening and honest responses can help allay concerns and fears among your children.

- a.** Address your child's fears in an honest and accurate way. Be calm, caring and age appropriate. Elementary school-aged children need simple and concrete explanations. Middle school-aged children may need myths and rumors dispelled. They can often understand why communities are enacting certain rules. High school-aged children appreciate more in depth and detailed discussions.
- b.** Recognize and accept that children have feelings of nervousness and worry.
- c.** Explain social distancing but try and keep in touch with family and friends.
- d.** Be positive and provide extra hugs, love, and displays of affection.

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