

COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents and Caregivers of Pre-School and School-Age Children

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COVID-19 Basics

How do I prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- Stay home if sick. Only leave for essential medical care and [testing](#) or other essential errands.
- Keep physical distance. Stay at least 6 feet away from people when outside of your home.
- Wear a [face covering](#). You can be contagious even if you don't have any symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze, or talk. Protect those around you by wearing a face covering. Children over 2 should also wear face coverings.
- Practice healthy hand hygiene. [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Clean frequently touched surfaces regularly. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your arm when sneezing or coughing; do not use your hands.

Are children at risk of COVID-19 complications?

- [Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children](#) (MIS-C) is a new health condition associated with COVID-19 that is appearing in children in New York City (NYC) and elsewhere. Although it is rare, children with MIS-C can have problems with their heart and other organs and may need to receive medical care in a hospital.
- Common symptoms of MIS-C include a fever lasting several days, abdominal pain, conjunctivitis and rash.
- If you think your child may have MIS-C, call your child's doctor. If your child is severely ill, go to the nearest emergency room or call **911**.

What is a face covering and when must I wear one?

- A [face covering](#) is any well-secured paper or cloth such as a bandana or scarf that covers your nose and mouth.
- People who do not have symptoms may still be able to spread COVID-19. A face covering can help prevent you from spreading COVID-19 to other people, so it is important that you wear one whenever you leave home and cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others.
- NYC will be distributing face coverings in parks, Department of Education (DOE) [Grab-and-Go meal sites](#), NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) buildings, some Mitchell-Lama buildings, grocery stores and during physical distancing enforcement.

Do children need to wear a face covering?

Yes, any children 2 years or older must wear face coverings in other public places where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet from others. Children 2 years or older do not need to wear a face covering while attending a child care program. Children less than 2 years of age should **not** wear a face covering because of an increased danger of suffocation. Small children are more likely to touch their face covering, so parents and caretakers should wash children's hands or apply alcohol-based hand sanitizer often.

Should my child or I get tested for COVID-19?

All New Yorkers can get a COVID-19 diagnostic test, regardless of whether they have symptoms or are at increased risk. Tests are free at NYC Health + Hospital testing sites. Visit nyc.gov/covidtesting to find a testing site near you. Consult with your pediatrician to see if your child needs a test for COVID-19.

You will not be asked about immigration status. COVID-19 testing and care services are not a public benefit under the [public charge rule](#).

Child Care and Camps

What can I do if I need child care?

- You can search [here](#) for Group Family Day Cares, Family Day Cares and School Age Child Care programs regulated by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, which are considered essential businesses and may remain open.
- At this time, center-based and school-based child care programs regulated by the NYC Health Department may only serve children of essential workers responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- If you need informal care, 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, moderate to severe asthma, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, cancer or a weakened immune system), as they are most at risk for severe COVID-19 illness.
- 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 DOE's Regional Enrichment Centers. For more information, visit schools.nyc.gov and search for **REC**.

- If you are an essential worker, you may also be eligible to [apply for funding from NYS](#) to help you pay for your existing child care arrangement.

Will summer camps be allowed?

- Yes, per state order, summer day camps will be open starting June 29. The State will decide on sleep-away camps in the coming weeks.
- Camps will have to follow new health and safety guidelines and may have reduced enrollment in order to maintain physical distancing. Parents that need camp should reach out early to ask camps about their plans and registration processes. You can search for NYC Health Department authorized sites by visiting nyc.gov/health and searching for **Child Care Connect**.

Summer Tips and Questions

Will free meals programs continue in the summer?

Yes. Adults and children can pick up free meals at more than 400 Meal Hubs across the city. Learn more about food and other resources for New Yorkers by visiting nyc.gov/coronavirus.

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

- Try to limit in-person [social gatherings](#) to a core group of friends or family. Playdates should be arranged with caution and cannot have more than 10 people.
- To reduce risk, gather outdoors, wear face coverings and maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet from members of other households.
- If eating, avoid family-style meals with food shared between members of other households.

Is it OK to spend time outdoors?

- Yes. Go outdoors with your children. The fresh air and change of scenery is good for both adults and children. Avoid activities that involve large groups, as it is especially hard for children who love to hug, tag and tumble with friends to keep a safe distance.
 - Remember to dress in light clothing if it is hot, drink plenty of water and wear sunscreen.
 - If visiting a wooded area, wear light-colored clothing and [check for ticks](#).
- It's important to have active time every day for your family's health and well-being. Here are some steps you can take to keep children and adults active but safe:
 - Follow the [four prevention tips](#) at the beginning of this FAQ.
 - Avoid team sports and crowded playgrounds. Engage in activities such as walking and bicycling.
 - Carry alcohol-based 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.

Can teens spend time together?

- Talk to your teens to make sure they understand the importance of physical distancing and wearing face coverings. 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 continuing to maintain physical distancing and to wear face coverings when not at home is important, even if they and their friends do not feel sick.
- Encourage teens to stay in touch with friends through phone, social media and video chat applications (apps).
- Encourage teens who are symptom-free and without underlying health conditions to spend time outdoors, while practicing physical distancing.
 - Walking, running and bicycling are good examples of activities that do not require shared equipment or close contact with others.
- Teen-specific mental health resources are available on [UNICEF's webpage](#).

If my child or I want to participate in public protests, what is the safest way to do that?

The safest action to take right now is to stay home as much as possible but, if you or your child decide to join a public protest, use the tips below to better protect yourself and the people you care about:

- Stay home if you do not feel well.
- Wear a face covering correctly—make sure it fully covers your nose, mouth, and chin.
- Carry and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Carry soapy water and tap water in a squirt bottle to use if you get exposed to pepper spray.
- Do not yell; use signs and noise makers instead.
- Go with a small group and keep at least 6 feet apart from other groups.
- Assume you've been exposed and [get tested](#) for COVID-19 five days after exposure.
- For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus and look for **Protesting Safely**.

What are some safety tips for spending more time at home?

- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects (such as tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs and cabinet handles) using a regular household cleaner, such as bleach, peroxide or an alcohol-based product..
- Make sure to keep cleaning products and other chemicals (e.g., medicines) away from young children, up high and out of reach.
- Frequently wash indoor surfaces, such as floors and windowsills, as well as children's hands and toys to limit their exposures to other environmental hazards such as lead.
- Open windows to improve ventilation, but make sure windows have properly installed window guards. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/healthyhomes.
- Air conditioning is the best way to keep cool when it is hot outside, but some people do not have an air conditioner or do not turn it on when they need it. Encourage them to use air

conditioning. Get to an air-conditioned place if they cannot stay cool at home. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/heat.

Coping and Mental Health

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 their age and developmental level.
- 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 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 age, 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 about COVID-19 on the internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

How can you help your family cope with the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- The COVID-19 pandemic may be stressful for you or 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. Providing support is the most effective way to help children cope with this stress. Children's well-being depends on your well-being, so it is important you do what you can to take care of yourself. To reduce your stress and 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 and video chat apps), and use healthy coping skills.
- Resources on coping and emotional well-being are available at nyc.gov/health/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.

Family Resources

- For the latest information, visit nyc.gov/health/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 links to City resources and information for NYC parents, visit [Growing Up NYC](#).
- For resources for multilingual learners, physical education and activities, college and career preparation, special education, early childhood and grade-specific resources, visit the DOE's [Activities for Students page](#).
- For information and activities for young children, including a special 2020 graduation speech from Cookie Monster, visit SesameStreet.org/caring.
- 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 and caregiver guide to help 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 various NYC library 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 free workout videos, family activities and wellness tips, visit ymcanyc.org/ymca-home.
- For tips for families with young children (newborn to age 3), visit zerotothree.org and search for **tips on coronavirus**.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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