

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a viral illness caused by a coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 and is spread through respiratory droplets when in [close contact](#) with someone who is infected. This virus can often cause a mild illness, with [symptoms](#) similar to that of the common cold. It can also cause more severe illness, with symptoms such as pneumonia (infection of the lungs).

SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

Watch for any of the following symptoms of COVID-19.



If your child has any new, worsening, or unexplained symptoms related to COVID-19, keep your child home from school or care. Use the [York Region Public Health COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool](#) to determine how long your child should stay home and whether they require testing at a COVID-19 Assessment Centre. If your child is sick, try your best to keep them separate from any siblings and other family members, as much as possible. Remind your child that you or another caregiver will keep a close watch at all times.

GETTING YOUR CHILD TESTED

If your child has symptoms of COVID-19 and no alternate diagnosis from a health care professional, we encourage you to get your child tested. If a child is tested for COVID-19, they must remain in isolation while waiting for results. If your child does not get tested for COVID-19, they must isolate for 10 days after symptoms first started and household members should isolate for 14 days from their last exposure to the symptomatic child.

For more information, visit
york.ca/COVID19

WHAT CHILDREN CAN EXPECT DURING A COVID-19 TEST

Children may feel nervous to get a COVID-19 test. Share the following with your child to put them at ease before going for a test:

- Tell them where they will get tested and that the person conducting the test will be wearing full personal protective equipment; i.e., a mask, face shield and gown
- Explain how the test is done in a child friendly manner, for example use a Q-tip to show them what the swab will look like and tell them that it might tickle when put into their nose
- Reassure them that you will be with them the entire time and will help them stay calm and still during the test
- Consider showing your child a picture or video of the test to put them more at ease
- If your child has a comfort toy or item, bring it with you to the test
- If you are testing more than one child, start with the youngest so that they don't get worried seeing their older sibling wince, get upset or cry
- Children may tear up from the swab; assure them this is normal and will quickly pass
- As a parent or caregiver, your attitude is important to your child when getting tested for COVID-19. Try to remain calm and relaxed as this will help everyone. When the test is complete, commend your child and celebrate with them. This will help them remember this as a positive experience should they need to do it again

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets when in close contact with someone who is infected. Based on current evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults.

Ways you and your child can help decrease the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Sneeze and cough into a sleeve
- Avoid touching the face, eyes, nose or mouth
- Practice physical distancing (by staying 2-metres or 6-feet apart from people outside your family)
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Avoid contact with people who are sick
- Stay home if you or your child are sick
- Wear a mask or face covering when physical distancing is not possible. When using a mask/face covering, always remember:
 - » Do not share your mask/face covering with other people
 - » Masks/face coverings should not be put on children under the age of two
 - » People who have trouble breathing should not wear a face covering
 - » Cloth masks should be a minimum of 2 layers; the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends 3 layers
- Additional information: Masks and Young Children



COVID-19 VACCINES FOR CHILDREN

- The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for children aged 12+
- As several companies have begun enrolling children in COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials, it is anticipated that more vaccines will be available for children in the coming months.
- While younger people are less likely to experience serious cases of COVID-19, the vaccine is a safe and effective way to help control spread of the virus and support the return to a more normal life

HOW TO SPEAK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19

- It is important to take an honest approach when speaking to your child in order to ensure they have accurate information about the pandemic
- Use language that is age-appropriate
- Let your child know that many healthcare practitioners and scientific experts are working hard to keep us all safe and healthy
- Validate your child's concerns and feelings. You can let them know you will be there for them whenever they need you or when they have questions or concerns
- Some children may regress with certain skills. For example, a child may start asking for help with getting dressed or a younger child may have more tantrums or may show aggression. You can respond in a caring manner, and you can distract and redirect
- Limit exposure to news and media as this can increase anxiety for both children and parents, and when tuning into news, choose a reliable news source
- Find creative ways to keep in touch with family and friends, and maintain daily routines
- It is important for parents and caregivers to role model healthy coping skills, and self-care. You can do this by ensuring you get adequate sleep, eat a nutritious diet based on [Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating](#), and exercise daily
- If you or your child are having challenges coping during this time, reach out to your physician, [Family Services of York Region](#), the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) or [Kids Help Phone](#) for support



INFLAMMATORY ILLNESS AND CHILDREN

There is a rare, but serious inflammatory illness that has occurred in a small number of children globally, which is thought to be associated with COVID-19, and includes symptoms suggestive of an illness called Kawasaki disease. This illness usually occurs weeks after COVID-19 infection. Researchers believe that symptoms may be a delayed immune response to the virus.

- Some children develop symptoms such as persistent fever, severe stomach pain and gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and a rash, pink eye, and red/purple discolouration to hands, fingers, feet and/or toes, and skin may peel (COVID-toes)
- If you think your child has any of these symptoms, make sure to seek advice from a health care provider, including your child's doctor, [Telehealth Ontario](#), or go to the emergency room
- You should take your child to the hospital right away if they have any of the following symptoms:
 - » Fast breathing or trouble breathing
 - » Bluish skin colour
 - » Not drinking enough fluids
 - » Not waking up or not interacting
 - » Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held

IMMUNIZATIONS DURING COVID-19

While vaccines provided through schools may be delayed with school closures, it is still important that you talk to your health care provider about staying up-to-date on other routine vaccines for infants and children.

- Routine vaccines: infants and children
 - » Two, four and six month vaccines (pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio, pneumococcal and rotavirus)
 - » Twelve and fifteen month vaccines (meningococcal, pneumococcal, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella)
 - » Eighteen month vaccines (pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio)
- Routine vaccines: adolescents and adults
 - » Boosters and catch-up vaccines can be given if you are seeing your healthcare provider for other urgent issues
- Seasonal influenza vaccines

