

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN

BACKGROUND

[COVID-19](#) is a virus 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) or even death. Older adults and those who have chronic medical conditions are more likely to develop severe illness.

COVID-19 tends to cause milder illness in children. Most people who become ill with this virus recover at home without the need for medical care.

There are currently no treatments for COVID-19 and vaccines are not yet available for children. The Pfizer vaccine is now approved for use in children and youth 12 and older and is very effective at reducing risk of COVID-19 infections and serious illness/death. We strongly encourage all individuals 12 and older to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are able to.

SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

While many children have no symptoms (asymptomatic) or have mild symptoms when they have COVID-19, children are still at risk of developing severe illness or complications. They can also pass the virus on to others, even if they do not have symptoms.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 CAN INCLUDE:



Fever (37.8° C or higher)



New or worsening cough



Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or fast breathing

OTHER SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 CAN INCLUDE:

- Sore throat or difficulty swallowing
- Lost sense of smell or taste
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Runny nose or nasal congestion (unrelated to seasonal allergies and post-nasal drip)
- Unexplained fatigue, malaise or myalgia (tiredness, feeling unwell, or muscle aches)
- Delirium (confusion, hallucinations, loss of balance)
- Unexplained or increased number of falls
- Chills
- Acute functional decline (trouble concentrating or doing regular tasks)
- Exacerbation of chronic conditions (worsening)
- Headaches
- Croup
- Red/purple discolouration to hands, fingers, feet and/or toes, and skin may peel (COVID-toes)
- Lethargy
- Difficulty feeding in infants

IF YOUR CHILD HAS ANY SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19:

- If your child's symptoms are severe or you are worried about your child, call 911 or go directly to your nearest emergency department.
- If your child has any COVID-19 symptoms but is not severely ill, reach out to your physician to see if your child needs to get tested or complete the [Ontario Self-Assessment Tool](#) to decide how to proceed
- If a COVID-19 assessment is recommended, make an appointment for your child at a local [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#).
- For directions on what to do while waiting for the results, see [Your Child Has Been Tested for COVID-19: Now What?](#)
- Call Southwestern Public Health's COVID-19 Response Centre at 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9 if you have any questions.

INFLAMMATORY ILLNESS AND CHILDREN

There is a rare, but serious inflammatory illness that has occurred in a very small number of children, which is thought to be associated with COVID-19. It includes symptoms suggestive of an illness called 'Kawasaki Syndrome'. This illness usually occurs weeks after the COVID-19 infection starts.

Researchers believe that symptoms may be a delayed immune response to the virus.

- Symptoms may include: persistent fever, severe stomach pain and gastrointestinal symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and a rash, pink eye, and swollen hands and feet
- 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

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets or aerosols when in close contact with someone who is infected or in poorly ventilated spaces. Based on current evidence, children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. One of the best ways to reduce your risk of COVID-19 is by getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are able.

Encourage your child to help stop the spread of COVID-19 by teaching them to:



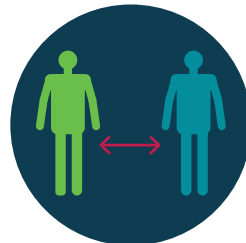
Wash their hands often with soap and water or [alcohol-based hand sanitizer](#) that is at least 60% alcohol.



Sneeze and cough into their sleeve



Avoid touching their face, eyes, nose or mouth



Practice [physical distancing](#) (by staying 2 metres or 6 feet apart from people outside your family)



Help or ask someone to help [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched objects and surfaces



Avoid contact with people who are sick



Stay home if they are sick



Wear at least a three layer, tightly woven fabric (such as cotton), non-medical cloth mask or [face covering](#) when [physical distancing](#) is not possible.

When using a non-medical mask/[face covering](#), always remember:

- Medical masks should be left for health care providers
- Masks should be washed frequently and stored safely between uses.
- Wash your hands before and after using your mask.
- Do not share your mask/face covering with other people
- Masks/[face coverings](#) should not be put on children under the age of 2
- People who have trouble breathing should not wear a face covering

[Online instructions](#) can show you how to make your face coverings at home. Also, many online and in-store retailers offer affordable cloth masks.

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Adapted with permission from York Region Public Health

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IMMUNIZATIONS DURING COVID-19

It is still important to ensure your children are protected from other vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccines provided through schools will resume with school reopening. You can also talk to your healthcare provider about staying up to date on other routine vaccines for infants and children.

- Routine vaccines: infants and children
 - 2, 4, and 6 month vaccines (pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio, pneumococcal and rotavirus)
 - 12 and 15 month vaccines (meningococcal, pneumococcal, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella)
 - 18 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 when available



HOW TO SPEAK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT COVID-19

This is a very difficult time for children and their loved ones. Children may be worried about themselves, their loved ones and friends getting ill from COVID-19. Parents/guardians, family members and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children understand the current situation in a way that is honest, accurate and minimizes anxiety and fear. The following resources are available to support you in talking to children about the pandemic:

- Children's Mental Health Centre: [Talking to Your Anxious Child About COVID-19](#) and [Tips for Supporting your Family's Mental Wellness](#)
- About Kids Health—Hospital for Sick Children: [COVID-19 Learning Hub](#)
- A book to support and reassure children: "[My name is Coronavirus](#)"
- If you or your child are having challenges coping during this time, reach out to your physician, the [Canadian Mental Health Association--Elgin County](#) or [Canadian Mental Health Association--Oxford County](#) or call [Kids Help Phone](#) for support



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