

Guidelines for Talking to Kids About COVID-19

It seems that everywhere you turn, someone is talking about the 2019 novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19. Kids hear these conversations and can worry about themselves, their family, and friends. Parents, family members, school staff, and other trusted adults play an important role in helping kids make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate, and minimizes anxiety or fear. El Paso County Public Health has created guidance to help adults have conversations with kids about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

General guidelines for talking to kids

- Remain calm and reassuring. Kids react to both what you say and how you say it. They also pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.
- Make time and be available to listen and talk. Let kids know they can come to you when they have questions and allow them to voice their feelings.
- Avoid language that might blame others and lead to stigma. Viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.
- Pay attention to what kids see or hear on television, radio, or online. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.
- Provide information that is honest, accurate, and appropriate for the developmental level of the child.
- Talk to kids about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media are not true.
- Teach kids everyday actions to reduce the spread of germs. Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash and wash their hands. Facilitate a regular handwashing regimen. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water is not an option.
- Talk about any new actions being taken at school to help protect kids and school staff (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities).

Facts about COVID-19 for discussions with kids

Try to keep information simple and remind them that health and school officials are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the short name for "coronavirus disease 2019." It is a new virus that doctors and scientists are still learning about it.

Recently, this virus has made a lot of people sick. Scientists and doctors think that most people will be ok, especially kids, but some people might get pretty sick.

Doctors and health professionals are working hard to help people stay healthy.

What can I do so that I don't get COVID-19?

You can practice healthy habits at home, school, and play to help protect against the spread of COVID-19:

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow. If you sneeze or cough into a tissue, throw it in the trash right away and then wash your hands.
- Keep your hands out of your mouth, nose, and eyes. This will help keep germs out of your body.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Follow these five steps—wet, lather (make bubbles), scrub (rub together), rinse and dry. You can sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice. Remember to wash your thumbs and under fingernails.
- If you don't have soap and water, have an adult help you use a hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Clean and sanitize frequently. Older children can help adults at home and school clean the things we touch the most, like desks, doorknobs, light switches, and remote controls. (Note for adults: you can find more information about [cleaning and disinfecting on CDC's website](#).)
- If you feel sick, stay home to do your part in preventing the spread of germs.

What happens if you get sick with COVID-19?

COVID-19 can look different in different people. For many people, being sick with COVID-19 would be a little bit like having the flu. People can get a fever, cough, or have a hard time taking deep breaths. Most people who have gotten COVID-19 have not gotten very sick. Only a small group of people who get it have had more serious problems. From what doctors have seen so far, most children don't seem to get very sick. While a lot of adults get sick, most adults get better.

If you do get sick, it does not mean that you have COVID-19. People can get sick from all kinds of germs. It is important to remember is that if you do get sick, the adults at home and school will help get you any help that you need.

If you suspect that your child may have COVID-19, call the health care facility to let them know before you bring your child in to see them.

How to manage the social and emotional health of kids

- Children of all ages and adults need support as they process their complicated emotions and fears about the world in general and COVID-19, specifically.
- Commit to talking and listening to your family. Share facts about this situation in a way that is age-appropriate for them and helps them feel loved and heard.

- While COVID-19 is new and the immediate future is somewhat uncertain, we know from studying history and reflecting on personal growth that turbulent times often make us stronger as individuals and as a community.
- Reinforcing positive messages with our children and peers can teach children how strong and resilient they are.

Resources for families

[NPR: Just For Kids: A Comic Exploring The New Coronavirus](#)
(Comic, Audio Clip, and [YouTube Video version](#))

[PBS Coronavirus Student Guide: Virus Explainer and News Update](#)

[American Psychology Association: Speaking of Psychology: Coronavirus Anxiety](#) (Podcast)

[NBC News: How to talk to your kids about the coronavirus](#)
(and ease their fears)

[CDC: What You Need to Know About Handwashing](#) (Video)

[Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools from Colorín Colorado](#)

[Harvard Business Review: How Working Parents Can Prepare for Coronavirus Closures](#)

It's a word you might have heard
at school or online or on T.V.



This coronavirus is a newly discovered virus. It causes a disease called COVID-19.

In some parts of the world it has made lots of people sick.