How to Care for Your Child with COVID-19 at Home

In this handout, learn how to care for your child at if they have COVID-19.

**HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD HAS COVID-19?**

Your child should be tested for COVID-19 if they have any of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- New sore throat
- New cough (not related to chronic illness)
- New shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New runny nose/nasal congestion
- New loss of taste or smell
- New muscle ache

Children with COVID-19 may also have abdominal (belly area) pain, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, poor appetite or feeding, headache, joint pain or fatigue. These symptoms alone are not a reason to test unless your child has been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

**WHERE CAN I GET A COVID-19 TEST?**

You can find a testing site and information about COVID-19 testing at the Massachusetts Department of Health’s website at www.mass.gov/covid-19-testing. Check the website before scheduling to make sure you know if the test is free, covered by your insurance or if you will need to pay. If you are not sure, call the testing site or your insurance company.

You can also use a home testing kit (often called antigen tests). Children recently exposed to COVID-19 without symptoms may test negative at first. Test again a second time in 1-2 days.

Additional information on self-testing is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/self-testing.html

**WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY DOCTOR?**

Children with mild symptoms (such as fever, mild sore throat, nasal congestion, mild cough, aches, and pains) can usually be taken care of at home without needing to see or call your health care provider.

**WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY DOCTOR? (CONTINUED)**

You should call your doctor’s office if your child has any of the following:

- Fever, based on the following:
  - In babies under 12 weeks, a fever over 100.4°F (38°C) (Do not give fever-reducing medication until you speak with your doctor or the nurse.)
  - In older children, a fever over 105°F (40.5°C)
- A fever over 102.4°F (39.1°C ) that does not respond to fever medication or that lasts for more than 3 days
- Hard time breathing
- Wheezing (whistling noise when breathing)
- Not taking fluids
- In babies, no urine in diaper for 8 hours
- In children over age 3, no urine output in 10 hours
- Lethargy (extreme fatigue or tiredness) or sleeping excessively
- Ear pain
- Severe sore throat
- Develops a rash covering much of the body
- If your child has other medical problems as well as COVID-19
- Any time you are worried about your child’s condition

As always, call 911 or take your child to the emergency department if they have difficulty breathing or develop other serious symptoms.

**HOW LONG CAN I EXPECT MY CHILD TO BE SICK?**

Each child is different. Some children may not be very sick at all. Others may have high fevers and feel very sick. Your child may continue to have mild symptoms for up to 2 weeks.

**HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF MY CHILD AT HOME?**

The care for a child with COVID-19 is the same as for any child with the flu or a virus. These are the most important things to do for your child:

- Stay calm and comfort your child.
- Wear a mask when within 6 feet of your child when caring for or comforting them.
HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF MY CHILD AT HOME? (CONTINUED)

- If your child is younger than 12 weeks old, call your doctor’s office for any fever over 100.4°F (38°C). Do not give your baby any fever-reducing medications without checking with your doctor or nurse.

- If your child is over 12 weeks old, use fever-reducing medications for a temperature over 102°F (38.8°C) or if you think the fever is making your child uncomfortable. You can start with acetaminophen (Tylenol®). If that does not work and your baby is 6 months of age or older, switch to ibuprofen (Motrin®), unless your doctor has instructed you otherwise. Follow the dosing directions on the package.

- Encourage your child to drink fluids. Your child should drink almost as much fluid as they did before they were sick. If you are breastfeeding, you can continue to do so.

- If your child is congested or coughing, you can use a humidifier in their room.

SHOULD OTHER PEOPLE IN THE HOME BE TESTED?

We recommend that anyone exposed to a child with COVID-19 be tested. An exposure is defined as being within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes within 48 hours of their onset of symptoms or positive test (if asymptomatic, or not showing symptoms).

HOW CAN I PROTECT OTHERS IN THE HOME FROM COVID-19?

- Wear a mask when within 6 feet of your child.
- Wash your hands every time you have close contact with your child.
- If your child is old enough, they should also wear a mask when within 6 feet of anyone in your home.
- If possible, your child should stay in a space separated from others and use a separate bathroom.
- Give your child their own set of household items, such as paper plates, cups or eating utensils. They should not share household items with other family members.
- Everyone in your home should wash their hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds and avoid touching their faces.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE?

Isolation is for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who have symptoms of COVID-19. Quarantine is for people who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. The CDC has more information at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html.

HOW LONG DOES MY CHILD NEED TO ISOLATE?

Note: The CDC guidelines change frequently, so you should check www.cdc.gov/ for any updates. This was the CDC guidance as of January 4, 2022.

Your child must stay at home for 5 days following the positive COVID-19 test or if they have COVID-19 symptoms. After 5 days, your child can leave the home (if they can wear a mask around others) and only if they meet both of the following:

- There are no symptoms or symptoms are resolving (getting better)
- They have not had a fever within the past 24 hours

Your child should continue to wear a mask around others for another 5 days. If your child cannot wear a mask around others, they should continue to isolate at home for another 5 days.

Avoid people who are immunocompromised (when the immune system is not as strong or does not work as it should) or at high risk for severe disease. You should also avoid nursing homes and other high-risk settings until after at least 10 days. The hospital is considered a high-risk setting.

HOW LONG DO OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS NEED TO QUARANTINE?

If your child is isolated, it is best for your child’s primary caretaker to quarantine at home. Household members who test positive should isolate.

Guidance around the need for quarantine with an exposure is changing. See the CDC, Massachusetts Department of Public Health or your state website for the most up-to-date guidance.

Once your child’s isolation period is complete, household members should also wear a mask around others for 10 days.

Anyone outside of the household who has been exposed to your child should get tested 5 days after the exposure or sooner if symptoms develop. They should also wear a mask when around others for 10 days.

Once isolation and quarantine are completed, your child, family and other contacts should continue to follow local guidance on the prevention of COVID-19 spread in the community.

WHEN CAN MY CHILD RETURN TO SCHOOL AND OTHER ACTIVITIES?

- Check with your child’s school, daycare, activity coordinator or place of employment and follow their guidelines for returning to normal activities.
- If your child is sick, they should remain home.
- Your child does not need a doctor’s note to return to school.
HOW DO I QUARANTINE IN MY HOME?

What are the quarantine guidelines? (As of January 12, 2022)

The quarantine guidelines are for people who were exposed to someone with COVID-19. Day 1 of quarantine starts the day after the exposure.

People in quarantine should:

- Stay home and away from others for 5 days. After that, continue to wear a well-fitting mask around others for 5 more days. To learn more about well-fitting masks, visit the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/effective-masks.html
- If you cannot quarantine, you must wear a mask for 10 days.
- Watch for COVID-19 symptoms. If you develop symptoms, test immediately and begin isolation.
  - If you do NOT develop symptoms, test on day 5 with an antigen home test or laboratory test
  - If you test negative, you can leave your home.
    - Continue to wear a mask around others for another 5 days
  - If you test positive, isolate for at least 5 days from the date you test positive. If you develop symptoms, re-start isolation for 5 days from the date you develop symptoms.
  - If you cannot get a test 5 days after the last close contact with someone with COVID-19, you can leave your home after day 5 if you have not had any COVID-19 symptoms. For more information about COVID-19 symptoms, visit the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html
    - Wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after your date of last close contact when around others at home and in public.
    - Avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, nursing homes and other high-risk settings until after at least 10 days. For more information on COVID-19 and people who are immunocompromised or high-risk, visit the CDC’s website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html

Who needs to quarantine after exposure to someone with COVID-19?

- Anyone who is unvaccinated (such as children under 5 years of age)
- Anyone not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, including primary (first) vaccines and boosters or additional doses (for some immunocompromised people)

Who does not need to quarantine after exposure to someone with COVID-19?

- Anyone up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, including primary vaccines and boosters or additional doses (for some immunocompromised people)
- Anyone who has had a positive viral test for COVID-19 within the last 90 days. A viral test is also called a PCR or nasal swab test. (Antigen tests, or at-home tests, do not count for this.)

If my child does not need to quarantine, what should they do?

- Wear a mask around others for 10 days
- Test on day 5, if possible. If your child tests positive, they should stay home and start isolation.
- If your child develops symptoms, get a test and stay home to start isolation.

Can my child go to school during quarantine?

Check with your child’s school to see if they can go to school during quarantine. Some schools have test and stay programs, which allow children to go to school during their quarantine. However, they should not participate in other community activities.

What does it mean to stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccines?

The CDC recommends that everyone stay up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines. Staying up to date means:

- Anyone age 12 years and older should get a booster within the recommended timeframe.
  - Boosters are due 5 months after receiving the Pfizer® or Moderna® vaccines or 2 months after receiving the Johnson & Johnson® vaccine.
  - The Pfizer® vaccines are approved for children age 5 years and older. The Johnson & Johnson® and Moderna® vaccines are not approved for anyone under 18 years of age.
- Moderately or severely immunocompromised people age 5 years and older who received the Pfizer® or Moderna® vaccines as their primary vaccines should receive an additional dose of vaccine 28 days after the second dose. People age 12 years and older should also get a booster within the recommended timeframe.

What should I do if my child develops symptoms during quarantine?

If your child develops symptoms, get a test and stay home to start isolation.
HOW DO I ISOLATE MY CHILD FROM OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS?

Stay home except to get essential medical care.

- Your child should stay home except to get medical care.
- Call ahead before medical visits to allow the care team to prepare COVID-19 precautions.

Separate your child from other people in your home.

- If possible, pick one primary caregiver for your child.
- Your child should stay in one room as much as possible, away from other household members.
- If possible, your child should use a separate bathroom. If not, clean and disinfect the bathroom after each time your child uses it.

Maintain distance

- Please do not allow any nonessential visitors in your home.
- Everyone should wear a mask in the same room with your child.
- Your child should also wear a mask around other people, even inside the home.
- If your child cannot wear a mask, other people should wear a mask or stay outside the room where the child is under isolation.

Follow precautions with household surfaces, food preparation, dishes, and bedding

- Clean all high touch surfaces (counters, tables, doorknobs, faucets, toilets, mobile devices, etc.) with household cleaning spray or wipes.
- Your child should not prepare or serve food to others.
- All dishes, glasses, cups, utensils, towels and bedding must be washed with soap and water after your child uses these items.

Teach your child the following steps that everyone should follow:

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If your child cannot use a tissue, have them cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow.
- Throw used tissues away. Immediately wash hands. Use a trash can lined with a disposable bag.
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Rub the fronts and backs of hands and the spaces between all fingers the whole time. Then rinse with water.
- If soap and water are not available, clean hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of their hands and rubbing them together until dry.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Rev. 1/2022. MassGeneral Hospital for Children and Massachusetts General Hospital do not endorse any of the brands listed on this handout. This handout is intended to provide health information so that you can be better informed. It is not a substitute for medical advice and should not be used to treatment of any medical conditions.