

Protecting your child from coronavirus

From [Department of Education and Skills](#)

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What to do if your child has symptoms of coronavirus

This advice is for babies and children up to the end of primary school, usually the age of 12 or 13.

Teenagers should follow the advice for adults on [when to contact their GP about getting tested for coronavirus](#).

Children and babies can get coronavirus (COVID-19). But they seem to get it less often than adults and it's usually less serious.

When to get urgent medical help

If your child becomes very unwell quickly, it's rare that they have coronavirus. Their symptoms may be because of another illness.

[Read more about symptoms in babies and children that need urgent medical help.](#)

Phone 999 or 112 if your baby is under 3 months old and has a high temperature (38 degrees Celsius or more). If your baby is aged 3 to 6 months and has a high temperature, phone your GP urgently

When to keep your child at home and phone your GP

Do not send your child to school or childcare if any of the following is true.

Your child has:

- a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or more
- any other common [symptoms of coronavirus](#) - a new cough, loss or changed sense of taste or smell, or shortness of breath
- been in [close contact](#) with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus
- been living with someone who is unwell and may have coronavirus

You will need to:

- isolate your child - this means keeping them at home and completely avoiding contact with other people, as much as possible. [You can read more on self-isolation here.](#)
- phone your GP - they will advise you if your child needs a [coronavirus test](#)
- everyone that your child lives with should also restrict their movements, at least until your child gets a diagnosis from their GP or a coronavirus test result. This means not going to school, childcare or work.
- Treat your child at home for their symptoms.

Your child should only leave your home to have a test or to see your GP.

Follow the advice on what to do if your child:

- is given another diagnosis by your GP
- is not tested and is also not given another diagnosis from your GP
- tests positive for coronavirus
- tests negative for coronavirus

Children who are close contacts of someone who has coronavirus

If your child has been in close contact with someone who has coronavirus, you should [restrict their movements](#) for 14 days, even if they feel well.

If your child develops symptoms, isolate your child and phone your GP to arrange a test for coronavirus.

When it's okay to send your child to school or childcare

It's usually okay to send your child to school or childcare if they:

- only have nasal symptoms, such as a runny nose or a sneeze
- do not have a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or more (as long as their temperature has not been lowered by taking any form of paracetamol or ibuprofen)
- do not have a cough
- have not been in [close contact](#) with anyone who has coronavirus
- do not live with anyone who is unwell and may have coronavirus
- have been told by a GP that their illness is caused by something else, that is not coronavirus. Your GP will tell you when they can return to school or childcare.
- have got a negative ('not detected') coronavirus test result and have not had symptoms for 48 hours

Runny nose or sneezing

You do not need to restrict your child's movements if the only symptoms they have are:

- a runny nose
- sneezing

They can continue to go to school or childcare if these are the only symptoms they have.

If your child also has a high temperature (38 degrees Celsius or over) or has any other [common symptoms of coronavirus](#) - isolate your child, phone your GP and restrict your movements.

Most of the time, you do not need to phone your GP if a runny nose or sneezing are your child's only symptoms. Talk to your pharmacist instead.

A runny nose or sneezing on their own are more likely to be symptoms of a cold or other viral infection.

[Compare symptoms of coronavirus, flu and cold](#)

[Read more about colds, coughs and viral infections in children here.](#)

Children and testing

Your GP will decide if your child needs a test for coronavirus.

They will usually need a test if they have:

- been in close contact with someone who has the virus
- common symptoms of coronavirus
- been in contact with someone who has symptoms

While you wait for their test and test result, follow the advice on keeping your child at home.

Bringing your child to a test centre

You may need to drive your child to a test centre. They may find going to a test centre a strange experience. They will see people in protective clothing. They may find this frightening.

Explain to them what will happen before they go. [You can read more here about what to expect at a test centre here.](#)

The HSE has produced some great comics which will help reassure any children who need to get tested. [You can see them by clicking here.](#)

Negative (not-detected) test result or another diagnosis

Your child can return to their normal activities once they have been given either:

- a negative (not-detected) test result and are 48 hours without symptoms and, or
- another diagnosis, that is not coronavirus

You and anyone your child lives with will no longer need to restrict your movements.

Positive test result or not tested and no alternative diagnosis

Your child will need to continue to self-isolate if:

- their test result is positive
- they are not tested and are also not given an alternative diagnosis - if this happens they should be treated as if they have coronavirus

They'll need to remain in self-isolation until both of these apply:

- they have not had a high temperature (38 degrees Celsius or over) for 5 days
- it has been 14 days since they first developed symptoms

Caring for a child who is isolating

If you are looking after a child who is isolating there is a risk that you can become infected too. You will become a [close contact](#) if your child tests positive for coronavirus or has not been tested and not been given an alternative diagnosis.

You will need to:

- restrict your movements for 14 days
- get tested for coronavirus

Continue to restrict your movements until 14 days after your child's self-isolation period ends.

If you have symptoms or are unwell

Self-isolate if you have symptoms or become unwell. Follow the advice on self-isolation.

You may also need to:

- be tested for coronavirus
- treat your symptoms at home

Get urgent medical help if your child is very unwell

When to get emergency help

Call 999 or 112 or go to the nearest emergency department (ED) if your child:

- is under 3 months old and has a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher, or you think they have a fever
- has a rash that does not fade away when you press a glass firmly against it (use the ['glass test'](#))
- has pale, blotchy, blue or grey skin
- feels unusually cold to touch
- has pauses in their breathing, has an irregular breathing pattern or starts grunting
- has severe difficulty breathing
- is becoming agitated or unresponsive
- is going blue around the lips
- has a seizure or fit for the first time (they cannot stop shaking)
- becomes extremely distressed (does not stop crying) or is confused
- is drowsy and hard to wake or unresponsive

Do not put off getting medical help if your child is unwell. Your child has a better chance of recovery from any medical condition if they see a doctor quickly.

It is unlikely your child has coronavirus

If your child becomes very unwell quickly with any of these symptoms, it could be for any of a number of reasons.

Illnesses in children include:

- [meningitis and septicaemia](#)
- [colds, coughs and other viral infections](#)
- [flu](#)

It's rare for coronavirus (COVID-19) to cause severe illness in children, but it can happen. This is why your doctor may need to rule coronavirus out first.

Tell the emergency services if your child has been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus

What will happen next

Your child will be assessed by healthcare professionals. They will try to find out what is wrong with your child, and if it is because of coronavirus or something else.

They will ask you if:

- anyone who lives with your child is ill
- your child has been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus

If they cannot give your child a definite diagnosis, your child may need [a test for coronavirus](#)

Your child will need to self-isolate from others until coronavirus is ruled out by either a:

- different diagnosis
- negative test result

Self-isolating from others means keeping your child at home, separate from other people. Do not have visitors. [Read advice on how to care for a child who has to self-isolate here.](#)

Make sure that your child [continues to wash their hands properly and follow hygiene advice around coughing and sneezing](#) and regularly and follow hygiene advice around coughing and sneezing

Follow the separate advice if your child has been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus

When to call your GP urgently

Call your GP urgently if your child:

- is 3 to 6 months old and has a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher, or you think they have a fever
- finds it hard to breathe and sucks their stomach in under their ribs, the muscles of their neck seem to move as they breathe or their head bobs up and down as they breathe
- seems dehydrated – for example, nappies are not very wet, has sunken eyes, has a dry mouth or no tears when they're crying
- becomes drowsy (very sleepy) or irritable and you can not settle them with toys, food, TV or picking them up - especially if this happens after their temperature has come down
- has extreme shivering or complains of muscle pain
- is getting worse or if you are worried about their symptoms
- is vomiting constantly or has severe abdominal (tummy) pain that won't go away

Testing your child for coronavirus

Your child may be tested for coronavirus, but if your child becomes very unwell quickly with any of these symptoms, it could be for a number of reasons.

It's rare for coronavirus (COVID-19) to cause severe illness in children, but it can happen. This is why your doctor may need to rule coronavirus out first.

Your GP will send your child for a coronavirus test if they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, regardless of your child's diagnosis.

Your child may also need a coronavirus test if:

- your GP is not sure what is causing your child to be ill
- someone your child lives with is ill for an unknown reason

[There is advice here on bringing your child to a coronavirus test](#)

What will happen next

Your GP will assess your child and advise treatment based on their symptoms. You will be asked to keep an eye on your child's symptoms in case they get worse.

Your child will need to self-isolate from others until coronavirus is ruled out by either a:

- different diagnosis
- negative test result

If your child is not tested and your GP is unable to diagnose their illness, they will be treated as having coronavirus. Read advice on what you and your child will need to do.

Anyone else they have been in contact with should be aware of symptoms of coronavirus in case they develop them.

Paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS)

A small number of children who have coronavirus have needed hospital treatment for an inflammatory syndrome called paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS).

PIMS is a life-threatening disorder caused by an unusual response to an infection by your body's immune system. It is similar to Kawasaki disease or toxic shock syndrome and is very rare.

We don't know if these children developed PIMS because they have coronavirus. It is too early to tell if there is a link.

Children who now need hospital treatment for PIMS are being tested for the virus. This is a precaution.

Protecting your child from coronavirus

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can affect children as well as adults.

But cases of coronavirus are much less common in children. Children generally get a milder infection than adults or older people. Often, they have no symptoms.

[Read about what to do if your child has coronavirus symptoms](#)

If you are worried about your child's health, phone your GP.

Protecting your child

The most important things you can do to protect your child are:

- [follow the advice on protecting yourself and others](#)
- look out for [symptoms of coronavirus](#) if your child has symptoms, they will need to [self-isolate](#)
- encourage your child to wash [wash their hands properly and regularly](#)
- clean and disinfect surfaces in your home and things people touch a lot. Coronavirus can live on surfaces so it's important to do this. Don't forget door handles and the toilet flush.
- follow advice to prevent your child from catching or spreading viral infections

Face coverings and children

Face coverings are not recommended for children under the age of 13. Young children may not be able to follow the important [advice on wearing face coverings](#)

But children under 13 should wear a face covering if their doctor or healthcare worker advises this. For example, some children may be advised to do this when attending a hospital clinic.

Children older than 13 are more likely to be able to stick to the important advice on how to wear a face covering properly. They should follow the [same advice as adults on face coverings](#).

Watch how your child should wash their hands

Flu vaccine

Your child should get the flu vaccine.

The vaccine is free for:

- children aged 2 to 12 years old
- all children who have a pre-existing health condition

Children with health conditions

Children with underlying health conditions may be vulnerable to any infection. But it appears the risk of severe illness from coronavirus is low, even if your child has:

- an underlying health condition
- special healthcare needs

If your child has a health condition they and everyone in the family should still:

- be extra careful in watching out for symptoms
- strictly follow the advice on good hygiene and hand washing

Your child should try and keep up their normal activities and attend school. This is good for their overall wellbeing.

If your child has recently had a transplant or has severe immunodeficiency, talk with their specialist. They will advise if your child needs to take any extra precautions.

If you do have concerns about your child's health condition, ask their specialist team for advice.

A small number of children with coronavirus have developed an inflammatory syndrome called paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome (PIMS). This condition is rare. It mainly occurs in children who do not have a health condition. Read more about PIMS. [Read more about PIMS here.](#)

If your child has a health condition and gets symptoms of coronavirus

If your child has a health condition and gets symptoms of coronavirus:

- isolate your child - this means keep them at home and completely avoid contact with other people. This includes other people in your household - [Read advice on self-isolation](#)
- phone your GP and specialist - they will advise you if your child needs a coronavirus test.

School

All children should attend school as normal unless they:

- have a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or more

- have other common symptoms of coronavirus - a new cough, loss or changed sense of taste or smell, or shortness of breath
- have been in close contact with someone who has coronavirus
- live with someone who is unwell and may have coronavirus

If you are worried about their health, phone your GP.

Childcare

Make sure that your childcare facility is following public health guidance.

All childcare facilities should have:

- hand sanitiser outside canteens, playrooms and toilets - this should be positioned safely for children
- well maintained and stocked hand washing facilities
- a strict cleaning routine - where regularly touched objects and surfaces are disinfected often
- a plan for dealing with children and staff who develop symptoms of coronavirus
- a small supply of masks in case staff need to care for a child who develops symptoms of coronavirus
- a plan for how they will manage core services if any staff need to self-isolate or restrict their movements

Where possible, children should be placed in one consistent group during childcare. This group will contain the same children and staff members to minimise the spread of infection.

Exercise and play

All indoor and outdoor activities for children should follow public health guidelines. We are still at risk of a large surge in infection. Everyone should use their own judgement to help slow the spread of coronavirus.

If you and your child go to a play area:

- follow social distancing guidance - keep 2 metres from other children and adults
- get your child to wash their hands before and afterwards
- use hand sanitiser when hand washing facilities are not available
- make sure your child follows good hygiene practices when coughing or sneezing

Children taking part in camps, youth clubs and other activities

Children taking part in group activities will be placed in one consistent group. This group will contain the same children and staff members for every activity.

If your child moves between parent or carer's homes

Your child may usually move between parent or carer's homes during the week. But it's best if they stay in one home as much as possible.

If anyone in the home has symptoms while your child is there, your child will need to restrict their movements. They'll need to stay in that home.

Court orders in relation to access, maintenance and guardianship have not changed. They should still be followed.

But talk with your child's other parent. You or your legal advisers may be able to agree an arrangement so that your child can stay in one home for now to keep them safe. This could involve using technology like video calls. If you cannot agree on an arrangement, you could use a mediation service. [mediation service](#)

If your child is due to get vaccines (immunisation)

Your child should still get their vaccines as normal. But if your child has symptoms of coronavirus, they will need to self-isolate. Do not take them to your GP. Phone your GP and they will postpone the vaccines for a few weeks.

When your child has recovered and is out of self-isolation, phone your GP to make a new appointment.

Read more about vaccines for your child. [Read more about vaccines for your child.](#)

If your child visits someone at higher risk from coronavirus

Children may spread the virus. This is why they should take care when visiting people at very high risk from coronavirus, [such as people over the age of 70 or the medically vulnerable.](#)