COVID-19/coronavirus
what to do if your child is sick

Far fewer cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) have been reported in children than in adults. Usually, the virus causes a milder illness in kids, though some children have become pretty sick.

Many parents wonder what to do if their child gets sick. Here's what you need to know.

what are the signs & symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)?
The most common signs of COVID-19 are a fever, cough, and trouble breathing. Some people might have:

- symptoms of a cold such as a sore throat, congestion, or a runny nose
- chills
- muscle pain
- headache
- a loss of taste or smell
- nausea or vomiting
- diarrhea
- tiredness

Some kids are having symptoms caused by inflammation throughout the body, sometimes several weeks after they were infected with the virus. This is called multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C). Doctors are trying to find out how these symptoms are related to coronavirus infection.

Symptoms of MIS-C can include:

- fever
- belly pain
- vomiting or diarrhea
- neck pain
- a rash
- red eyes
- feeling very tired
- red, cracked lips
- swollen hands or feet
- swollen lymph nodes

Most kids with MIS-C get better after they get special care in the hospital, sometimes in the ICU (intensive care unit).

what should I do if my child has symptoms?
Call your doctor if your child has a fever, cough, trouble breathing, sore throat, belly pain, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, dizziness, or just doesn't feel well. If your child has been near someone with coronavirus or been in an area where lots of people have coronavirus, tell the doctor. Talk about whether your child needs a test for coronavirus. The doctor can decide whether your child:

- can be treated at home

- should come in for a visit

- can have a video or telehealth visit

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In a telehealth visit, a health care provider can see your child on video while you stay at home. If you can, choose a telehealth provider who specializes in caring for kids. If the doctor thinks your child needs care right away, they will guide you on where to go. When possible, check for telehealth in your area before anyone in your family is sick.

Watch for signs that your child might need more medical help. Go to the ER if your child:

- looks very sick to you

- has breathing problems. Look for muscles pulling in between the ribs or the nostrils puffing out with each breath.

- is confused or very sleepy

- has chest pain

- has cold, sweaty, pale or blotchy skin

- is dizzy

- has very bad belly pain

Call 911 if your child is struggling to breathe, is too out of breath to talk or walk, or turns blue or has fainted.

how can I keep my family safe if my child has symptoms?

- Keep your family home until you talk to your doctor. If the doctor thinks your child's symptoms could be COVID-19, everyone in the household should stay home until testing is done or symptoms are gone. Check the CDC's website for details.

- Keep other people and pets in the house away from your child as much as possible.

- Try to have one person only care for the sick child so others are not exposed.

- If your child is over 2 years old and can wear a face mask or cloth face covering without finding it hard to breathe, have them wear one when the caregiver is in the room. Don't leave your child alone while they're wearing a mask or cloth face covering. The caregiver also should wear one when in the same room. To see how to put on and remove face masks and coverings, clean them, or make your own cloth face covering, check the CDC's guide.

- If possible, have your sick child use a different bathroom from others. If that isn't possible, wipe down the bathroom often.

- Everyone in your family should wash their hands well and often. Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

- Use regular household cleaners or wipes to clean things that get touched a lot (doorknobs, light switches, toys, remote controls, phones, etc.). Do this every day.

how do doctors test people for coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Doctors, hospitals, commercial labs, local health departments, and the U.S. Public Health Service are working together to help get tests to the people who need them.

To test someone for coronavirus, doctors put a long Q-tip (a swab) into the nose or mouth, then send it to a lab. If the person coughs up mucus, doctors might send that for testing too. Some areas offer drive-thru testing, which lets people stay in their car during the test.

If you think your child has symptoms of COVID-19, call your doctor or local health department. They will give you the most up-to-date information on testing.

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how is coronavirus (COVID-19) treated?
Doctors and researchers are working on medicines and a vaccine for coronavirus. Most people with the illness, including children, get better with rest, fluids, and fever-reducing medicine. People with more severe symptoms may need treatment in the hospital.

what else should I know?
Keep doing these things to keep your family healthy:

- Wash hands well and often.

- Cover coughs and sneezes.

- Avoid contact with other people, especially those who are sick.

- Make sure kids get all recommended vaccinations for other infections, like the flu and measles.