

Play it safe: What kids should know about the coronavirus outbreak

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Image 1. Children draw a rainbow and the slogan of hope being shared in Italy, "Andrà tutto bene" (Everything will be alright), during quarantine measures amid the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on March 13, 2020, in Milan, Italy. Photo: Pietro D'Aprano/Getty Images

Schools across the country are closing because of the coronavirus. Many students may be jumping for joy. Others might be worried, scared or confused.

The American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that knowledge cures fear. With that in mind, let's answer a few common questions about coronavirus.

Everybody keeps talking about "coronavirus" and "covid-19." Which is it?

Both of these terms are correct, but they refer to different things. The virus itself is called "SARS-CoV-2." This is short for "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome" and "coronavirus." SARS-CoV-2 causes an illness known as "Coronavirus Disease 2019," or covid-19. It is also called "novel coronavirus" because it is a type of coronavirus scientists have not seen before.

How does covid-19 affect people?

The most common symptoms are fever, cough and shortness of breath. However, someone with the virus may not feel sick immediately. It could take 2 to 14 days for them to start feeling sick.

Scientists say most people who get the virus can fight it like they would the flu. Some people won't even realize they have the virus. However, it will be harder for the elderly and people with other health problems to fight the virus. In the worst cases, covid-19 can cause death. Fortunately, death is extremely unlikely for infected children and teenagers.

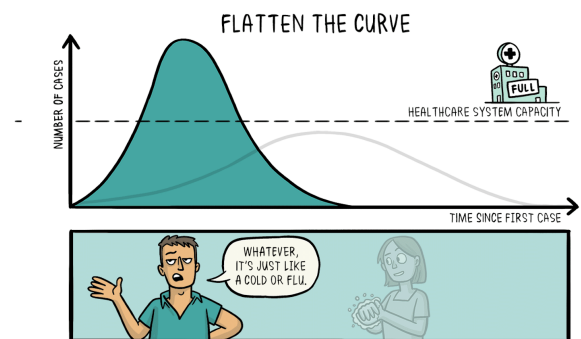
Can pets get covid-19?

A dog in Hong Kong, China, has tested positive for the coronavirus. However, it has no symptoms. The World Health Organization focuses on the public international health. It is called WHO for short. The organization has studied covid-19. For now, WHO does not think people can catch the virus from dogs. Still, keeping your animals inside will lower their chance of getting the virus.

Why are schools, stores and restaurants closing?

SARS-CoV-2 is new. Our bodies do not know how to fight it yet. This makes it easier for the virus to infect new people quickly. Large groups gather at schools, stores and restaurants. This makes them perfect places for the virus to spread.

Experts are most worried that many people could get covid-19 at the same time. It would be hard for hospitals to treat all those people at the same time. That is what happened in Italy. That would make it difficult to treat people with covid-19. Full hospitals would also make it difficult for people with other health problems to get medical help.



Can this coronavirus be stopped?

Scientists are working on a vaccine to help stop the coronavirus. Vaccines help the body learn how to fight the virus. However, the vaccine will take time. For now, communities and families can help slow the spread of the virus.

Why do we have to wash our hands so often?

Washing your hands is always a good idea to prevent illness. Hand-washing is even more important as this coronavirus spreads. Make sure you wash your hands with warm or cold water and soap. Scrub your hands, fingers and wrists. Scrub them for as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday to You" twice. Remember to cover your cough with a tissue or your elbow, too.

What is "social distancing"?

Your parents might not want you to play basketball with your neighbors these days. Or, they might not want you to go to a party this weekend. This is because of "social distancing." It might feel like a bummer. However, experts say it is one way everyone can work together to slow the coronavirus.

The idea of social distancing is simple. We must limit how many people we are in close contact with. Then, the virus has fewer chances to spread. The Centers for Disease Control studies diseases. It is called the CDC for short. The CDC says people should stay at least six feet apart.

Social distancing gives people a better chance to avoid covid-19. It can make you and your family safer. Social distancing can also help your grandparents, friends and strangers who may have a higher risk of getting a serious case of the virus.

How long will this last?

Unfortunately, no one can answer that question yet. The CDC recommends canceling large events for at least eight weeks. Your parents and teachers will help think of creative ways to pass the time.

