

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

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.25.20

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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

As schools across the nation close in response to coronavirus concerns, many students may be jumping for joy. Others are worried, scared or confused. As the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Knowledge is the antidote to fear."

With that in mind, let's answer a few common questions about coronavirus. Let's start with its name.

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 of covid-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Once someone has the virus, it may take 2 to 14 days for them to start feeling sick.

Scientists say most people who get the virus will be able to fight it like a bad case of the flu. Some people will not even realize they have the virus. However, it will be harder for the elderly and people with conditions like heart disease to fight the virus. In the worst cases, covid-19 can cause death. Fortunately, death is unlikely for infected children and teenagers.

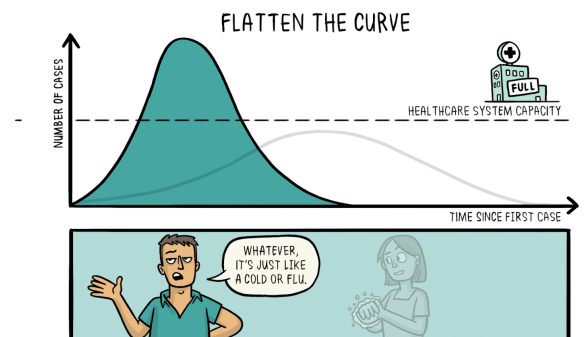
Can pets get covid-19?

A dog in Hong Kong, China, has tested positive for the coronavirus, but it has no symptoms. It's unclear if the virus harms pets. The World Health Organization focuses on public international health. It is called WHO for short. The organization has studied covid-19. The WHO says there is no evidence yet that people can catch the virus from their dogs. Still, keeping your animals inside will lower their chance of catching the virus.

Why are schools, stores and restaurants closing?

Since SARS-CoV-2 is new, our immune systems haven't learned how to fight it off yet. This allows the virus to easily move around and infect new people quickly. Since large groups gather at schools, stores and restaurants, they are the perfect places for the virus to spread.

The biggest concern is many people getting covid-19 all at once. It could be hard for hospitals to treat all those people at the same time. That is what happened in Italy. This is a problem for those who need treatment because of covid-19. Full hospitals are also a problem for people that may need help for medical problems besides covid-19.



Can this coronavirus be stopped?

Scientists are working on a vaccine that could help stop the coronavirus. However, it will take time. For now, communities and families can take steps to slow the spread of the virus.

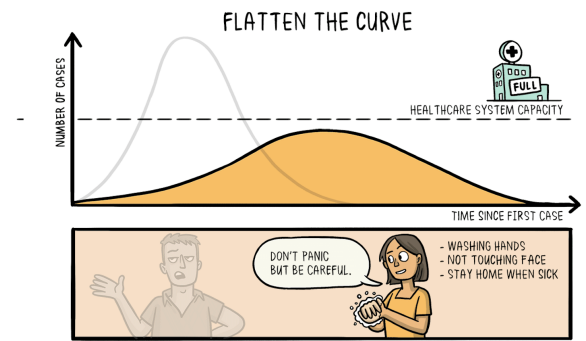
Why do we have to wash our hands so often?

Washing your hands is always a good idea to prevent illness. Hand-washing is even more important as this coronavirus spreads. Make sure you're washing your hands well by using warm or cold water and soap. Scrub every inch of your hands, fingers and wrists. Keep going as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday to You" twice. Also remember to cover your cough with a tissue or your inner elbow. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, called the CDC for short, has more tips at [cdc.gov/handwashing](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing).

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 be a bummer, but experts say it's another way everyone can work together to slow the coronavirus.

The idea of social distancing is simple. If we limit how many people we are in close contact with, then the virus has fewer opportunities to spread. The CDC says "close" is six feet or less. Social distancing helps you and your family have a better chance to avoid covid-19. It also helps keep your grandparents, your Scout group and people on the bus safer, too. Any of those people could be at higher risk to get a more serious case of the virus.



How long will this last?

Unfortunately, no one can answer that question yet. The CDC recommends that large events be canceled or postponed for at least eight weeks. Your parents and teachers will be coming up with creative ways to pass the time.