



## Get the facts about COVID and kids

As 2020 unfolded, the world learned just how quickly the novel coronavirus COVID-19 could spread. The World Health Organization noted that, by September 2020, nearly 30 million people across the globe had contracted the virus, and that was before the resurgence of the virus in mid-fall.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children's Hospital Association says that children younger than age 14 are less likely to become infected with COVID-19. Nick Davies, an epidemiologist and mathematical modeler at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, published a study with other researchers in *Nature Medicine*.

Even though most children with COVID-19 exhibit mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, some can get severely ill, requiring hospitalization and intensive care. Some children have even died after COVID-19 infection. That is why doctors and other health professionals urge parents not to minimize the threat posed by COVID-19.

### Development of MIS-C

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health partners continue to look into a rare but serious medical condition called multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), which is associated with COVID-19. This condition can cause inflammation in various parts of the body, including the kidneys, heart, eyes, skin, lungs, and gastrointestinal organs. Doctors do not know what causes MIS-C, but many children diagnosed with it also had the virus that causes COVID-19.

MIS-C can be serious, and even deadly. It may leave lasting scars on the lungs, and can lead to more severe illness down the line, says Rachel Graham, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

### Unwitting carriers

Children may not know they have COVID-19 because they are asymptomatic. Even if they do not feel or look sick, they can still transmit the virus to others, including vulnerable people in their families.

Kids are more likely to transmit illnesses, according to health experts. They have a higher tendency to interact with each other and touch different objects and body parts, which only underscores the importance of exercising caution when letting children interact with others outside their households.

### Infants and health-compromised children at risk

The CDC notes that babies under age 1 might be more likely to have severe illness from COVID-19. Children of other ages with underlying medical conditions might also be at increased risk of severe illness. Underlying medical conditions that can put children at greater risk include diabetes, asthma and heart disease since birth. In addition, children who receive immunosuppression therapies may be vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19.

Fever and cough are the most common symptoms of COVID-19 in children. Families must remain diligent, learn to recognize symptoms and ensure their children practice social distancing.

## Preventive care and the pandemic

Procrastination is not typically considered a good thing. But as the world spent much of 2020 confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, putting certain things on hold became part of the new normal.

In an effort to reduce infection rates, public health officials with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization urged people to limit their in-person interactions with people outside of their own households. As a result, many of the things people do on a regular basis, including seeing their physicians for wellness visits, were rescheduled.

It's understandable that many people postponed preventive care and wellness visits during the pandemic, but it's also potentially dangerous. For example, researchers with the Health Care Cost Institute found that childhood vaccinations declined by roughly 60 percent in mid-April 2020 compared with 2019. Other screenings and preventive exams, including mammograms, pap smears and colonoscopies, also declined by significant percentages during the pandemic compared to the previous year.

The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion notes the power of preventive care is undeniable. In fact, the NCCD-PHP points out that, while chronic diseases are among the most common and costly of all health problems, they're also among the most preventable. Annual wellness visits and early detection efforts like routine screenings for at-risk populations can uncover problems before they escalate into something more serious. In addition, annual physicals, which are provided free of charge through many health insurance policies, provide great opportunities for doctors to advise patients on their overall health and how to improve it if exams and blood work turn up any red flags.

Visiting a doctor during the pandemic

As vital as preventive care can be, it's understandable if people are hes-



itant to visit their doctors during the pandemic. But patients can take certain steps to calm their nerves about booking preventive care appointments during the pandemic.

- Schedule telemedicine appointments. The number of telemedicine appointments has skyrocketed during the pandemic. While the transition from predominantly in-person appointments to telemedicine might have been a reluctant and rocky one at the start of the pandemic, many doctors' offices have since firmly established their telemedicine protocols. The Mayo Clinic advises patients who have not yet tried telemedicine to contact their doctors' offices to arrange an appointment.

- Inquire about office procedures. Doctors try to keep patients healthy, not get them sick. Various medical organizations, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, have provided thorough checklists to help physicians prepare their offices to welcome patients during the pandemic. Patients can ease their concerns by contacting their doctors' offices and asking them about their pandemic-related protocols.

- Don't hesitate to make requests. There's no such thing as being too safe from COVID-19, so patients can work with their doctors to calm their fears even further. Ask to pay copays over the phone and request that the front desk call you when the doctor is ready so you don't have to sit in the waiting room.

Preventive care is an important component of health care, even during a pandemic.