

Virus alert

Protection, prevention, and control measures to keep your family safe

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Perhaps one of the top things playing on your mind as a parent these past few days is the growing fear from reports that a new virus previously reported in China has reached our shores. In the age of international travel where people can move easily and quickly from one place to another with so much convenience, emergence of disease from a different part of the globe is highly likely. At present, information about the novel Coronavirus from Wuhan China (2019nCoV) is limited, but as parents, it is important to know how we can best protect our children.



1. PRACTICE HAND HYGIENE.

Proper hand washing is the most important thing that we can teach our children to prevent the spread of infection. Washing the hands using soap and running water for a minimum of 20 seconds is adequate, ensuring that palms and the back of the hand and the spaces between the fingers, the thumb, and the fingernails are gently scrubbed. This breaks the transfer of infection from one person to another, as frequent washing also limits transfer of disease-causing microbes to the things we touch. If soap and water is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs may be used when the same technique when the hands are not visibly soiled.

2. COUGHING ETIQUETTE

Most diseases in children are respiratory in nature, like the nCoV. As such, good coughing practices are essential to limit the spread of most childhood diseases. Coughing at a distance, the use of disposable tissue and washing of hands after coughing can help prevent the transfer of bacteria and viruses to another person. A better technique that we can teach children is to cough over the crook of their el-

bow. As compared to the hand, this is an area that is sparingly touched and rarely comes into direct contact with people and things during their daily activities.

3. LIMIT EXPOSURE

Avoiding travel to affected areas, highly populated places, tourist spots, and hospitals where there is a high likelihood that individuals affected by the disease may be present is prudent for both children and adults. Limiting contact of children to individuals with respiratory disease is warranted, with or without the present threat of the new virus. Allowing sick children to stay home from school and avoiding exposure of the rest of the family by placing them in a separate room are self-quarantine measures that will limit the transfer of disease.

4. WEAR PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

If exposure cannot be avoided, it is important to wear a mask. An N95 mask offers the best protection especially when the mode of transmission is of the new virus is presently unclear. If an N95 is unavailable, a regular disposable surgical mask also acts as a barrier for respiratory droplets that may contain the infection. The mask worn should fit the child properly, with ear loops or ties modified to achieve the best fit covering the nose and mouth in order to afford adequate protection.

5. MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH PRACTICES.

Adequate rest, relaxation, hydration, and proper nutrition are cornerstones of good health that help maintain an immune system that's able to fight disease. Ensure that children have enough down time from activities, have a good night's sleep, drink lots of water, and eat healthy and balanced meals to make sure they are in tip-top shape.

6. KEEP YOURSELF INFORMED.

Social media can be a quick source of information as events unfold, but it is important to verify information available from reliable sources. Official statements released by the Department of Health, the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and medical specialty societies offer the best source of information, with some websites (WHO and CDC) containing accurate, up-to-date, and patient friendly sources available that are easy to understand.

7. WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR.

Routine consultation with a pediatrician to prepare your child for a trip is good practice, with consultation done four to six weeks prior to departure. This allows for proper planning and review of vaccinations, as well as obtaining proper advice and safe practices if traveling to areas with risks that cannot be avoided. With the new coronavirus in particular, sick children with a history of travel to China or other affected areas, especially those coming into close contact with affected individuals need to be seen by a health professional immediately. Health institutions with protocols in place are preferred. This is to limit the spread of infection, such as the provision of an isolation room, ability to restrict patients with the same condition to a specific area within the facility, and report the possible infection. Signs and symptoms of the virus range from the common cold to difficulty of breathing, irritability, and weakness.

Wearing a mask and calling the clinic or emergency room prior to your arrival if the virus is suspected allows for the healthcare personnel to prepare the facility and activate hospital surveillance protocols early. Because the course of the illness is unpredictable, seeing the doctor during the early presentation of the disease allows for better monitoring, management, documenting, and reporting of the illness to help limit the spread of disease.

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