



COVID-19

Useful suggestions on how to answer children's questions about the Coronavirus

The Facts4Life approach to managing our health applies very much to the Coronavirus pandemic. Despite the highly infectious nature of the virus, it is still true that most people will recover by themselves with little or no medical intervention. However, there are things we can all do to help 'smooth the path' and lessen the impact of the virus on ourselves and others.

Below, Facts4Life's Dr Hugh van't Hoff answers some questions which have been posed by children about the Coronavirus.

Why did it start?

Viruses are common, we catch them all the time. They are passed from person to person by sneezing, being close to someone's breath, or handling something that has already been touched by virus-covered hands (tissues, door handles etc). Mostly the body should be able to fight off a virus after a few days.

When did it start?

It probably started in a city called Wuhan, in China, in late 2019.

Why is it called COVID-19?

It has been called COVID-19 by the World Health Organisation because COVID is short for 'Coronavirus Disease' which started in 2019. 'Corona' means fringed with a ring, like the ring of sunlight we see around an eclipse.



Some people are saying it is because the Chinese eat bats and they have caught the virus from the bats they have eaten. Is this true?

The Chinese have eaten a varied diet for many years so this isn't the reason. More likely the virus has been around for a while but has recently changed slightly so it can now be passed on to humans when this wasn't the case before.

Will we get rid of it?

We don't have a vaccine yet or a medicine which can kill the virus. Everyone who recovers (about 97-98 people in every 100) gets rid of the virus by themselves. Some may need help in hospital with a machine (a ventilator) to do their breathing for them whilst they recover. This is because some, often older, people's lungs need extra support.

What about older people who are fit and healthy? And, if someone's got asthma, how likely is it they'll get it?

The older and more ill someone is, the more likely the illness will be serious. That's why we have to look after the old and the ill very carefully. Children are far less likely to have a serious illness.

Can anyone get it?

Yes, anyone can get it – that’s why we need to look after ourselves and each other. There are some simple, proven ways to reduce your chances of catching the virus:

- Keeping a safe distance from each other – 2 metres (6ft) is the recommendation.
- Reducing the amount of time that we spend close to each other.
- Reducing the spread of the virus – hand washing thoroughly for 20-30 seconds (think of this as the time it takes to hum ‘happy birthday’ twice) and frequently, for example in France they suggest every hour.
- Catching our sneezes or coughs in a tissue (or your sleeve if not enough time to reach for a tissue), dropping the tissue in a bin immediately and then re-washing our hands.
- Try to avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.

Can you get it from door handles?

Yes. That’s why people need to wash their hands thoroughly, so they don’t pick it up or, if they already have it, so that they have clean hands when they touch surfaces.

Can you get it from food?

There is no evidence that we can, but we *can* catch it from bodily fluids so you should avoid sharing forks and spoons or drinking from the same glass. ALWAYS wash hands before touching food.

Can it go through things?

Not really. Viruses don’t move by themselves.

How does someone know if they’ve got it?

This is tricky – a proportion of people with the virus will have no symptoms (‘asymptomatic’), maybe as much as half of them. We think that most people with symptomatic infection will have a high temperature (above 38 degrees), a new and continuous cough and a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste.

If someone has it already do they need to quarantine themselves, or self-isolate?

Yes. Most people who get it will have a mild illness but whilst they’re ill they need to make sure as few people as possible get infected by them. It is best to self-isolate for 14 days and during that period keep as far apart from others as possible.

What is self-isolation?

It means staying in our families for 10 days. People can stay in the family home and go into the garden but, as far as possible, they need to keep a good distance from others. Friends are not able to come round and watch TV or play etc. Even if we and our family members have no symptoms, we are now being asked to stay at home because we might be carrying the virus but not be aware of this.

- Only go outside for food, to see the chemist or doctor or for one form of exercise a day, e.g. run, walk or cycle (you can exercise alone, with members of your household or with one other person only). You can still visit someone who lives alone and who is in your support bubble.
- Stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people.
- Wash your hands thoroughly (20 seconds minimum!) as soon as you get home.
- If 11 years or over, wear a face mask if you are in a supermarket or when close to others in public places.

If we are allowed to go to school, we should only have close contact with others in our social bubble and stay 2 metres away from everyone else.

Can animals get it from us?

Possibly, but there is little evidence of this happening. It’s best to be careful around animals, just like each other, and keep our hands washed and clean.

Can you catch Coronavirus more than once?

We now think that if you have already had a virus like the Coronavirus, you are likely to be immune so probably won’t catch it again. There are reports of a very small number getting the infection twice but these numbers really are tiny. To be safe it is important that we continue to take the same precautions to stop the spread of the virus.

Remember to ALWAYS



Wash your hands thoroughly! (20-30 secs minimum)



Wear a face covering in public places if you are 11 or older



Stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with or who are not in your social bubble where possible

Date reviewed: 6th January 2021
N.B. We will continue to review this as we find out more