



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.



**World Health
Organization**

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?

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 people's lungs need extra support – these people are usually older or have very serious medical problems.

What about older people who are fit and healthy?

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.

How do vaccines work?

We naturally kill off the virus after two weeks or so. During this process the immune system works hard to wipe out the virus. This is really hard work and can leave us exhausted. After we recover we have antibodies to the virus – these are chemicals which act like keys to unlock special areas of the virus the body has identified. They circulate in the blood when we have recovered and prevent another infection - when they meet a virus again the antibody key can open the virus because its key fits perfectly. The open virus is then unable to get into our own cells and cause more harm. This is called natural immunity. Vaccines work by helping us develop these special antibody keys through being infected. The most common way is to use an empty virus – the key will still be on its outside but there is no infecting RNA (ribonucleic acid) inside. This is the usual way we make vaccines and the way the AstraZeneca vaccine works. Another way is to make keys which kill off the RNA itself – these are used in the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine.

What is a variant?

A variant is a virus which is closely related to the original virus. It may differ in how infectious it is. Sometimes it is more infectious but it could be less infectious. When a chance change in the virus occurs and it makes it more infectious, it gets passed on more quickly. If it changes enough, the antibody keys you have from natural immunity or from vaccination may not work as well or at all.

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:

- 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 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 your 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 your 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 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. Some people have flu like symptoms – feel very tired, lack energy, or have muscle aches.

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 are ill they need to make sure as few people as possible get infected by them. If you've tested positive, it is best to self-isolate for 5 days and during that period keep as far apart from others as possible.

If you continue to feel unwell, then you should stay at home for longer. Unlike adults, children and those under 18 can return to school after 3 days if they have no symptoms. It is best to avoid vulnerable people (those whose immune system means they are at greater risk from the virus) for 10 days.

What is self-isolation?

We need to self-isolate if we have tested positive for the virus. It means staying in our families for a minimum of 3 days (5 for adults). 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.

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?

After recovering from COVID-19, most of us will have some protection from the virus. However, it is possible to catch the virus a second time. To be safe it is important that we continue to take the same precautions to stop the spread of the virus.

For further information go to:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

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N.B. We will continue to update this as we find out more