

COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Supporting your Child or Youth through COVID-19: A Parent and Caregiver's Guide

In the midst of a pandemic, many parents and caregivers are faced with questions regarding how best to support their child or youth. The following guidelines are designed to assist parents/caregivers in knowing how best to respond:

Avoid providing too much information:

When children and youth are presented with information that is difficult for them to understand, it creates unnecessary stress and anxiety. Therefore, particularly with young children, it is best to avoid providing high levels of detail. Instead, provide basic information (e.g. some people are getting sick so we need to do a few things differently). For older children and adolescents, more detail is okay, but be mindful of how much. For all of us, there comes a point where additional information serves to unnecessarily heighten anxiety rather than support us in enhancing health and well-being.

Keep adult conversations private and monitor media exposure:

Be mindful of discussing details of COVID-19 within earshot of your children. Children will be particularly inclined to tune into conversations where one of the participants is highly emotional so ensure that any such conversations happen away from listening ears. Also be mindful of your child or adolescent's exposure to media coverage of COVID-19. Generally speaking, where kids and media coverage are concerned, less is more. Adults can take on the role of communicating 'need-to-know' information.

Work to manage any of your own fears and anxieties:

Children and adolescents will take their cues about how to respond to the situation from how adults around them are responding. If you are calm and confident, they will be too.

Use the opportunity to solidify healthy habits

Now is a great time to step up your health teaching with your child or youth. Place increased emphasis on hand-washing at key times (e.g. after toileting, before eating, after coughing or sneezing, etc.) and continue to direct and support children and youth to cough or sneeze into their elbow.

Where possible, stick to your usual routine:

Children derive feelings of safety and security from feeling that things are predictable. Therefore, as much as possible, and where it is safe to do so, try to maintain your normal routine.

If you have general questions about COVID-19 call

1-800-958-6400



Health PEI

For the latest local information visit: PrinceEdwardIsland.ca/covid19

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Answers questions honestly, but avoid providing excessive reassurance:

For some children and youth, this situation will be very anxiety-provoking. In response to their fears, provide validation (e.g. It makes sense to me that you're afraid) and then provide some basic facts about the virus (e.g. not everyone is going to get sick, adults/doctors/nurses are all working hard to ensure everyone's safety). If children or youth continue to be anxious, provide more validation of their feelings and then encourage them to consider other possibilities to their worried thoughts (e.g. maybe none of our family will get sick, most people who do get sick get better after a short time, we have all had illnesses in the past and now we are fine).

Be available:

It is a stressful time, so ensure that your children and youth feel comfortable approaching you with their concerns. For older children and adolescents, it may be necessary to bring it up with them first so that they know that you are open to speaking with them about it.

Know what to expect:

It is normal for everyone (including adults) to feel scared and uncertain at a time like this. Changes in children's behaviour such as wanting to remain closer to caregivers, asking more questions or being more easily upset, are normal responses to increased stress and do not necessarily represent an immediate cause for concern. Be patient and supportive with your child as they work to cope with these feelings.

Stay in the know:

Check the Government of Prince Edward Island's website regularly for updates:
princeedwardisland.ca/covid19

Strike a balance:

Both for yourself and your children and youth, the key is to strike a balance between ignoring or avoiding the situation and becoming so wrapped up in it that the anxiety begins to interfere. It is normal and understandable to feel scared and also important to engage in balanced thinking about the likely outcomes of COVID-19.

Remember to have fun:

In stressful times it becomes extra important to ensure that both you and your child or youth, are taking good care of themselves (e.g. exercising regularly, eating healthy, getting good sleep) and enjoying fun activities. Particularly for adolescents, it will continue to be important to encourage socialization with peers. In cases of isolation, connecting with others via telephone or video (e.g. Facetime, Skype, etc.) will help to maintain a positive mood and sense of well-being.