

COVID-19 and Children with Disabilities

While children may seem to be less severely impacted by COVID-19,¹ little is known about how children with disabilities are affected by the virus. Your child may be at increased risk for contracting COVID-19 due to their specific health condition, behavior, and/or health care needs.

Risk Factors for COVID-19 in Children with Disabilities²

Health Condition	Behavior	Health Care Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased lung function (asthma, chronic lung disease, scoliosis, postural & rib cage restrictions) • Severe heart conditions • Chronic kidney disease • Obesity • Weakened immune system • Sickle cell anemia • Muscular Dystrophy • Cystic Fibrosis • Down syndrome • Cerebral palsy • Dwarfism • Hypermobility syndromes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent mouthing of objects • Frequent touching of objects • Difficulty washing hands • Difficulty keeping hands away from face • Difficulty keeping a safe distance away from others • Refusal/inability to wear a mask 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple physician appointments • Multiple caregivers • Hospitalization • Frequent blood draws or monitoring for healthcare needs

Suggestions to Keep Your Child Safe:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

- Review guidelines from the [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov) to ensure it is appropriate for your child to wear a mask. (Your child should be over two years of age and able to remove the mask themselves.)
- Ask your child’s healthcare providers and visitors to wear a mask. If your child is not able to wear PPE, ask your child’s healthcare providers and visitors to use a face shield.
- Ask your child’s healthcare providers and visitors to wear gloves.
- Have your provider use communicator masks, if your child has a hearing impairment or reads lips.

Physical Distancing:

- Limit instances in which your child will be around people other than those in your house.
- Limit the number of visits to public places such as grocery stores. If this is not an option, try to shop early in the morning or at times when the stores are less busy.
- If you need to visit other family members, try to do so in an outdoor setting.
- Ensure others caring for your child are following physical distancing guidelines.
- If your child has medical appointments, be sure providers are following physical distancing. For example, you should not be waiting in rooms with other patients; you and your child should be escorted

to a treatment room once checked in. Try to check in over the phone to avoid unnecessary waiting in the lobby.

Hand Hygiene:

- Keep wipes in easy to reach places in the home.
- Teach your child to cough and sneeze into the elbow rather than the hands.
- If your child uses a wheelchair or other assistive technology, use more frequent hand washing.
 - Consider wearing gloves when pushing the wheelchair and avoid cross contamination
 - Keep hand wipes available on the chair
 - Regularly wash the wheelchair or assistive device.
- Here is a resource regarding [COVID-19 Precautions for wheelchair and assistive technology users](#)

Strengthen your immune system:

While there is no known treatment or cure for COVID-19, having a strong immune system may be key. Ensure both you and your child are sleeping and eating a well-balanced diet. Try to avoid stressful situations, which can weaken the immune system.

Stress Reduction for Your Child:

- Routines allow a child to predict what is going to occur and may lessen stress. Set wake and sleep times, mealtimes, playtimes, and limited times for digital devices.
- Set aside time to do something fun, time to get outside and exercise or play. Physical activity and exercise can help to reduce stress.
- Limit your child's exposure to the news
- Connect with friends and family through Facetime, Zoom, or on the phone.
- Helpful resources for parents and families:
 - [Institute for Child Success](#)
 - [Unicef](#)
 - [National Center on Deaf-Blindness](#)
 - [Healthy Children Network](#)
 - [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN](#)
 - [Better Care Network](#)

Stress Reduction for You

- Take time alone and do something enjoyable.
- Meditate or practice mindfulness.
- Connect with others.
- Exercise or participate in physical activities to help relieve stress.
- Helpful resource from [American Psychological Association](#) on stress management.

Questions to Consider When Deciding on Returning to Daycare, School, Recreational Activities:

- *Will staff wear masks? Will the children be required to wear masks?*
- *How many people will your child be in contact with and for how long? The greater the number of people your child is exposed to and the greater the time (more than 15 minutes in close contact) the greater the risk of contracting COVID-19.*
- *How will hand hygiene be enforced?*
- *How will social distancing be enforced?*
- *Will staff and children who are symptomatic be required to stay home?*
- *Will the health of staff and children be screened on a regular basis?*

- *Will staff or children who have visited areas with high infection rates be quarantined before returning?*
- *Will the children be able to play outdoors or at least have a window opened?*
- *Will all be encouraged to practice respiratory etiquette?*
- *Is the flow of people designed to minimize contact? Is there a set path for entering and exiting the building to minimize contact?*
- *Are there visual cues on where children should stand to maintain social distancing? To wash hands often?*
- *Are there public restrooms? Are they cleaned after each use and limited to one person at a time?*
- *How frequently are surfaces washed?*
- *If transportation is used, is social distancing and mask wearing enforced?*

Additional Resources on COVID-19 and Disability:

- [The Arc for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Families Together Inc.](#)
- [CanChild](#)
- [New York City Department of Education](#)

References;

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). People with Certain Medical Conditions. Updated December 1, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>
2. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). COVID-19 in Children and Teens Information for parents and caregivers about COVID-19 in children and teens. Updated September 17, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2020/ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/symptoms.html>

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