

# Coronavirus (COVID – 19) – Information to support children and young people

## Advice for parents and carers

*Reports regarding Coronavirus continue to dominate the media as the number of confirmed cases in Australia increases. With the situation changing rapidly it is natural for children and young people to have questions, concerns, and to feel anxious or worried. This fact sheet contains some information for parents and carers to keep in mind when supporting their children.*

### Pay extra attention to your child's needs

Coronavirus information and advice is being discussed constantly – through the media, social media, at home, and at school. It is perfectly normal for children and young people to feel the need to talk about Coronavirus, to have questions, and to feel uncertain, concerned and anxious.

There is a common misconception that talking with children and young people about a topic such as Coronavirus may increase their anxiety. However, research suggests that it usually has the opposite effect. For children, not having information is scary, and many children will fill in the blanks with their own imagination – often imagining something far worse than the truth. For older children, they may take to the internet for their answers, which can sometimes become overwhelming or misleading.

### Responding to questions

If a child brings up Coronavirus or asks questions, it is important to acknowledge how they may be feeling and to answer questions as honestly as possible. Even if a child does not initiate a conversation, it is important to ensure that, as a family, you are having calm conversations about Coronavirus and providing accurate information. This will help children and young people to feel informed and understand what is happening.

It is important to emphasise that even though the number of people with the virus in Australia is increasing, the majority of people who contract the virus will either not get sick at all, or will get mild symptoms from which they will recover easily. Only a small minority of people may become very ill.

It is important for children to understand that we are lucky to live in a country where students will be able to access prompt and high quality medical attention. Also, it is important children understand the low risk of serious illness for people their age who are in good health.

Encourage children to engage in things that help them to feel better and make them feel physically and emotionally safe (for example listening to music, playing a favourite game with the family, or doing some exercise in the home). It is particularly important for children and young people to feel close to their immediate family who they are living with and, where possible, continue to communicate with those people outside the family (by telephone or video calls) who are helpful to their wellbeing.

Here are some pointers for how parents and carers can have a calm conversation with children and young people about Coronavirus and try to ensure that any concerns around the situation are kept at bay.

#### 1. **Be aware of your own behaviour.**

It's important that adults understand the effect their own behaviour can have on children. If you're visibly upset or react in a way that suggests you're fearful, children will take their cues from you. Remain calm in your conversations with children and young people, and reassure



them that, although this is an uncertain time, you are there to look after them and keep them safe.

## 2. Tell children the facts.

Scary headlines attract attention and help sell newspapers but they don't always tell the whole truth. Ensuring you're armed with facts will help keep conversations calm, considered, and constructive. Some key facts are:

- Although the number of confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in Australia is increasing, measures are being put in place to help to slow the spread of the virus.
- The majority of people who contract the Coronavirus will have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, from which they will recover easily.

Sharing this information should help reassure children that there is no immediate risk to themselves, their friends, or their family.

## 3. Explain what efforts are being made to contain the virus.

Authorities are responding quickly. Travel in and out of Australia has been restricted, with only Australian citizens and residents being allowed back into the country. Also, scientists in Australia and around the world are working hard to develop a vaccine and a treatment for the virus. In Australia, the Government is carefully monitoring and actively managing the situation – this is why advice for how to stay safe is updated often. Children should be confident that anyone who has the virus and needs medical attention will receive high-quality treatment quickly in our world class hospitals.

## 4. Finally, offer practical advice.

The easiest way to reduce the risk of being affected by viruses of any sort (including the common cold) is to cough or sneeze into your elbow or a clean tissue, keep hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub, and avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth. To slow the spread of Coronavirus, the Government has now advised people to avoid close physical contact with people outside of those living in your household. That means having a distance of 1.5 to 2 metres between you and anybody else. It is still ok to touch, hug and have close contact with those people who live with you in your home. If you do become unwell, you need to stay at home and avoid contact with others outside of your immediate family. With the support and encouragement of parents and carers, children and young people will be able to adopt these habits, which should help them feel as though they're able to exert some control over their circumstances.

## Communication is important

It is important that the lines of communication with children are kept open at all times. Children and young people need to feel informed and safe, especially when they hear so much information in the media.

Discussing the Coronavirus situation openly with children will provide the opportunity to reassure them that they are safe and dispel any false information they may have heard in the media or through rumours. With the situation changing rapidly, it is important for conversations about Coronavirus to take place regularly between parents and carers and their children. This will help to minimise the anxiety that children may feel when they hear new and sometimes contradictory information or advice.

If parents and carers notice their children becoming anxious or scared due to the amount of information they are hearing about Coronavirus on the news or through social media, it may be necessary to encourage and assist them to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle and to focus on other things.

## Available supports



Schools make a number of staff available to provide extra support to students who may be anxious and to provide information and advice to parents and carers. If you are concerned about your child's wellbeing, you can contact their school to ask what additional support might be available.

Support is also available through a number of Queensland Government agencies and community organisations. Parents and carers can:

- call 13Health (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice and assistance
  - review Queensland Health's [coronavirus webpage](#) for the latest information and advice
  - review headspace's [dedicated page about coping with stress related to Coronavirus](#), or contact [headspace](#) for professional support
  - contact Lifeline Australia's telephone counselling service on 13 11 14 for information, referral and advice
  - obtain help and information from the local General Practitioner or Community Health Centre.
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