



Talking to Children About Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

CONFIRMED CASES REPORTED FOR NEW MEXICO - Source: NMDOH Website, April 16, 2020

Children Look To Adults

It is important to remember that our children look to adults for guidance on how to react to stressful events such as these. Our children want reassurance, factual and age-appropriate information, and encouragement on the ways they can practice preventive measures on keeping themselves as safe as possible.

Emphasize that the grown-ups in their lives are doing everything they can to keep them safe and protected and that there is a low number of cases here in New Mexico. School closures reduce the risk of the virus from spreading. Remind your child of the times they were sick and then got better.

Young Children (under the age of 6)

Kids under six don't need much detail, like the name of a virus or the global threat of an illness. Be mindful about conversations you have with your partner or older children in front of your little ones. This includes shutting off any troubling images on TV or social media.

Instead, have a conversation about germs, how people get sick & things we can do to stay healthy, like hand-washing. If they do come to you with questions about this specific outbreak or something they've seen, keep it simple: offer them reassurance that your family is safe and healthy, and explain what actions your family is taking (hand washing, catch your coughs & sneezes, healthy habits).

Elementary Aged Children

For elementary kids, offer information about the outbreak: what it is, how it spreads, and ways to prevent it; however, stay away from talk of people dying. Keep your messaging simple and say with confidence, "There is an illness going around right now, so we have to be extra careful about cleanliness and being around people that seem sick." Really emphasize healthy habits like hand-washing, catching your coughs & sneezes which are good to practice at all times. Your child may already be seeing individuals wearing face masks in everyday common places. You can explain that this is simply their way of taking care of themselves.

Preteens & Teens

Be factual and don't hide things. Stick to the facts as we know them right now and dispel any rumors. Your child may be flooded with information from T.V. and social media; encourage them to limit their exposure if they begin to feel too overwhelmed. Even if your teen indicates that he/she is "okay" or "fine," keep checking in on them and offering opportunities for them to share their feelings when they are ready. With teens, you can also dive into the science and politics around the issue. Offer the data and facts you know and empower them to look up information from reliable sources, like the CDC and NDOH websites below. Seek out answers to questions together.

Here are some recommendations to support you in talking to your child:

- Remain calm and reassuring.
- Make it safe for your kids to come to you with their fears.
- Be honest and accurate, but don't overload them.
- Teach them ways they can protect themselves, especially good hygiene (most importantly hand washing).
- Limit TV & social media exposure, which can create more anxiety.
- Create a routine as much as possible.