

Talking and Sharing with Kids and Families on COVID-19

Overview

Concern over the COVID-19 coronavirus disease can make children, families and communities anxious. We do not know where and to what extent the disease may spread in Canada. We do know that COVID-19 is a new disease to humans, there is no cure or vaccination yet, and it is contagious. The severity of this disease ranges from person to person, from mild symptoms to more severe symptoms, and in some instances, death. We also know that preventing the spread and impact of COVID-19 takes a community effort. The actions of every adult, youth and child are critical to the health of our entire community.

At any time when a crisis or global challenge occurs, stress levels rise. Children look to the adults around them for guidance on how to react or respond to stressful events. We need to communicate with children without causing them undue harm or alarm. If parents and adults seem worried, anxiety may rise in kids.

Acknowledging your concern without panicking or frightening the children around you is appropriate. It also encourages them to take their own actions to reduce the risks of illness.

Children need factual, age-appropriate information about the seriousness of COVID-19. Children also need concrete instruction on how to avoid becoming infected or spread the disease. Providing facts and accurate prevention information helps children and youth cope with anxiety.

The Government of Yukon is working hard to ensure that people stay healthy. We encourage all parents and adults to take the time to meet their own needs and get support. In doing this, they are better equipped to meet the needs of the children around them.

Here are some ideas to help Yukon adults support the safety, health and well-being of themselves, our children and youth, our families and our communities.

Remain calm and reassuring

- Children will follow our verbal and nonverbal reactions or responses.
- What you say and do about COVID-19, current prevention efforts, and related events can either increase or decrease your child's anxiety.
- Practice self-care by finding moments to attend to your own thoughts, feelings and behaviour surrounding COVID-19. This will help you listen to your children and share information in a calm, clear and reassuring way.
- Emphasize to your children that they and your family are fine (if this is true).
- Remind them that you and the other adults in their community are there to keep them safe and healthy.
- Let children talk about their feelings and help reframe their concerns into helpful and factual perspectives with concrete, age-appropriate information.
- Focus on the positives around you - health, home, quality time, fresh-air, and so on.
- Know that you will cope the best you can with the people, resources and abilities you have.

Make yourself available

- Children may need extra attention from you and may want to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions.
- It is important that they know they have someone who will listen to them. Make and take time for children.
- Nighttime may be more difficult. Take time to read a positive story, practice [belly breathing](#), or simply be there and reassure them.
- Tell them you love them and give them plenty of affection.
- Making ourselves emotionally available during a time like this is key to supporting our children through this. As adults, we have our own concerns, demands placed upon us, responsibilities, and so on. Taking time or moments to meet our own needs - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual - will make it more possible for us to be emotionally available and ensure support for the children around us.

Monitor television viewing and social media

- Limit your own television viewing and access to information on the Internet and through social media.
- With older children and teens, review news and social media and share what is relevant in age-appropriate ways by sticking to facts and concrete information.
- Try to avoid watching or listening to news and information that might be upsetting when your children are present or at bedtime.
- Focus on the positive news reports and limit the negative ones. We often hear and see many stories based on speculation, rumours, fear and inaccuracies.
- When talking with children, share factual information about the virus. This means information that is short, to the point, and does not defend or justify. This approach can help reduce anxiety.
- Constantly watching updates on the status of COVID-19 can increase anxiety—so please avoid this.
- Be aware that news and adult-oriented information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children.
- Be mindful that the COVID-19 situation in Yukon is different than Ontario, and likewise is different in other countries such as Spain and Italy,
- Turn off or turn down news and social media outlets and physically engage with the children around you. Play, do board games or puzzles, share family time, watch movies together, do arts and crafts, cook, spend time outdoors and any other interesting, interactive activities.

Create and maintain routines

- COVID-19 has resulted in a very different context for all of us. It may take time to adjust and develop new routines and a “new normal” during this time.
- We all do well with routines. Keeping a routine will help create predictability and will promote overall health and well-being for your entire family.
- Work toward developing a regular schedule that includes:
 - regular waking up and bedtimes;
 - daily hygiene, such as showers, baths, face washing, teeth brushing;

- good nutrition and hydration, meaning drinking lots of water, eating balanced meals and limiting sugar and junk food;
- daily fresh air and exercise is really important at this time, while maintaining physical distancing (at least 2 metres) from other children and families that are not in your household;
- maintain regular virtual connections with family and friends, such as phone calls, video calls and taking the time to reach out to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so on, even if they live up the street and cannot visit at this time.
- Have more fun and play as a family.
- Keep learning alive in fun and family friendly ways - baking, making, constructing, educational websites and videos, crossword puzzles, play, discussion, music and dance, daily chores and household and yard work activities.
- Learning takes place in our thinking brains, for adults as well as children. We must feel calm and regulated (in control); any big emotions and fears need to be calmed by a trusted “other” (such as an adult, a friend, a government website or professional); and we need to feel connected with parents/adults/people who we trust and who care about us. Put these things first, and learning will resume.
- Home is not school, so please do not put pressure on yourself to be all things to your children. Our teachers and school staff will guide you in distance or online learning opportunities as needed.

Be honest and accurate

- Adults constantly respond to children’s questions. If you do not have an answer or are not sure how to answer something, it is okay to say so. Let children know that when you have the answer or more information to share, you will.
- In the absence of factual information, children often imagine situations far worse than reality. This is why it is best to offer age-appropriate and factual information, rather than to say nothing at all or brush off your child’s questions and concerns with broad statements like, “Don’t worry about it.”
- Children’s concerns are valid. Do not ignore their concerns- it is your job to reassure, empathize or offer affection when they are concerned.

- Explain that at present, very few people in Yukon are sick with COVID-19, that most will recover and that health officials, families and communities are doing their best to keep everyone as safe and healthy as possible.
- Share facts from reliable sources only such as [Yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca) and [Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca)
- Share that prevention involves actions we can take every day to keep healthy. These are concrete ways for children to know what they can do to contribute to safety.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 - actions for everyone

- At all times, follow the recommended instructions of Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health at [Yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca) to prevent and manage the spread of this virus.
- Health Canada identifies four key essential COVID-19 prevention actions:
 - Physical distancing – staying at home except for essential trips, staying 2 metres apart at all times from anyone not living in your household.
 - [Hygiene](#) –frequent, proper hand washing; covering sneezes and coughs; keeping hands away from faces.
 - Masks - wearing a non-medical mask or a face covering like a buff can help prevent your respiratory droplets from contaminating others or landing on surfaces. [Follow specific guidelines for non-medical masks](#). Medical grade masks should be left for medical professionals.
 - Disinfecting/ cleaning your home and high-touch areas. Health Canada recommends using regular household cleaners or diluted bleach on these surfaces:
 - toys
 - toilets
 - phones/electronics
 - door handles
 - bedside tables
 - television remotes
 - [More detailed prevention information at Canada.ca](#).

Review and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices

- Basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle habits help prevent all communicable illnesses like colds and flus, not just COVID-19.
- As an adult, when you practice basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle choices every day yourself, your kids will do the same. Leading by example is always more effective than nagging or lecturing.
- Simple good hygiene steps to prevent spread of illness include:
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Wash your hands multiple times a day with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (sing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star or Happy Birthday twice).
 - Use alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) if soap and water are not available (soap and water actually works better to remove germs).
 - When coughing or sneezing:
 - cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm, not your hand;
 - dispose of any tissues you have used as soon as possible in a lined waste basket and wash your hands afterwards;
 - put clothes that are sneezed or coughed on into the laundry.
 - Do not share food or drinks with anyone.
- Practice and encourage habits and routines that contribute to health and wellbeing and a strong immune system, such as:
 - healthy eating and hydration (drink clean water, not juice and pop);
 - good sleep, regular bed/wake up times;
 - daily exercise and outdoor time.
- In addition, for COVID-19, practice physical distancing (leave 2 meters between yourself and others).
- Giving children guidance on what they can do to prevent COVID-19 and other infections gives them a greater sense of control over how disease spreads, and will help to reduce their anxiety.

Take care of yourself - work toward health and self-care

- Consider your own mental/emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical health and well-being.
- Think of things you love to do that help you recharge and focus your mind away from worries.
- Make a plan for how you will find time - and then actually take the time- to meet these needs. Try getting up 30 minutes early, go to bed when your kids do, eat together.
- Use your spiritual or religious beliefs and values to ground and guide you -pray, read, meditate, breathe deeply, yoga/stretching, sing, connect with nature, or try mindfulness exercises.
- Nurture and speak kindly to yourself, in the same tone you would speak to a good friend or a very young child.
- Get out on the land, take a walk, go for a bike ride, breathe deeply, get fresh air.
- Practice gratitude -always find a small success and something you are grateful for, and encourage your children and family members to do the same.
- Look to crafts and traditional customs to help clear your mind, such as beading and sewing, art, drumming or dance.
- Keep connected - talk, text, or video chat with friends and family. Pick up the phone to hear someone's voice rather than simply e-mailing or texting them.
- Practice physical distancing at all times. Keep connected while adhering to Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommendations at [Yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca).
- Sit by a fire. To First Nations people, fire is sacred and represents many things. Fire is for cooking, warmth, lighting the way, and for conducting sacred ceremonies. There are many teachings connected to fire. Safely lighting a candle or a tea light at home can substitute for a fireplace or bonfire and bring the element of fire into your daily life.
- Reach out - asking for help is a sign of strength, courage, health and well-being.
- Plan ahead. Know what you do to help yourself if you require support. Here is a list of [supports available to Yukoners](#).

Know the symptoms of COVID-19

- COVID-19 is a type of coronavirus that attacks the respiratory system, including the throat, nose and lungs. It can make breathing difficult and, in severe cases, medical interventions such as oxygen or a ventilator are needed.
 - We are learning more about this virus each day, and it important to remember that we will find medical solutions over time, as we have with other illnesses.
 - Most people recover from COVID-19 without needing medical treatment.
 - Symptoms may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus. Symptoms typically include:
 - Fever
 - Tiredness/fatigue
 - Dry cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
 - If you have any of these symptoms, do the [online self-assessment](#).
 - **If you have health questions or concerns:**
 - Phone: 811 (Yukon HealthLine)
 - Email: covid19info@gov.yk.ca
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Resources

This document was prepared using the resources below. We encourage you to explore these websites and become informed. Correct information will help reduce anxiety for yourself, your family and your children.

- **Government of Yukon:** yukon.ca/covid-19
 - Supports for Yukoners: yukon.ca/en/covid-19-support-yukoners
 - Education and schools information for parents and families:
 - yukon.ca/en/your-government/find-out-what-government-doing/information-public-school-students-and-families
 - Continuing student learning at home: yukon.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19/continuing-student-learning-home#finding-a-routine-at-home
- **Government of Canada:** canada.ca/coronavirus
 - Prevention: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html?topic=tilelink#p
- **Child Mind Institute:** childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/
 - Belly breathing: childmind.org/article/anxious-stomach-aches-and-headaches/
 - Video link: How to Talk to Kids about the Coronavirus youtube.com/watch?v=WhVad8ToCiU
- **Council of Yukon First Nations:** cyfn.ca
- **BC Children's Hospital:** bcchildrens.ca

Take Time to Listen and Share

You know your child best. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Give them the information that health experts identify as critical to ensuring children's health and well-being.

Patience will be your ally -children and youth do not always talk about their concerns readily.

Take cues from your child. Invite your child to tell you anything they may have heard about the coronavirus, and how they feel. Be patient and give them ample time to ask questions. Your goal is to be prepared to answer questions and avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.

It is important that when parents, teachers and adults share information with kids, they share facts without showing a high-level of stress in their tone of voice, facial expressions or energy.

Remind children that adults are working to address this situation and remind children about preventive measures they can and do take every day to keep themselves and others around them healthy and safe.

Information is rapidly changing about COVID-19 -to have the most current information please stay informed at [Yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca). Click on the [Education and Schools](#) link for specific and up to date information from the Department of Education.

Sharing Information with School Aged Children & Youth

Sharing information with children and youth in an age-appropriate way is the key to providing factual and reassuring support to your children.

It is okay if you do not have all the answers. If you cannot answer your child's question, tell them that. Reassure them that when you have more information, you will share more information.

Primary:

- Early elementary school children do best with brief, simple information that balances COVID-19 facts with appropriate reassurances that their homes and schools are safe and that adults are there to help keep them healthy and to take care of them if they do get sick.
- Give simple examples of the steps people take every day to stop germs and stay healthy, such as washing hands.
- Use language such as “adults are working hard to keep you safe.”

Intermediate:

- Upper elementary and early middle school children are likely to be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe, and what will happen if COVID-19 comes to their community or school.
- They may need assistance separating reality from rumor and fantasy.
- Discuss efforts you at home are making and your community is making.

High School:

- High school students are often better able to discuss the issue in a more in-depth (adult-like) fashion. You can refer them directly to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts.
- Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19.
- Having such knowledge can help them feel a sense of control.