



This is an unprecedented time. Our lives have been disrupted, our routines forced to change, schools and sports cancelled, all without a clear end in sight. Our children look to us to help restore a sense of normalcy amongst the chaos, and to provide reassurance and stability. At CMA, we understand that many parents have questions and concerns regarding their children's health and well-being during these events, and we want to be able to provide a sane, reliable source of information and clinical perspective based on our current knowledge of the Novel Coronavirus.

Here are some of the more common questions we have been asked. If your question is not answered, please give our office a call, or refer to websites from the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>) and the VA Dept of Health (<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>).

As the situation continues to evolve, CMA regularly evaluates and alters our daily practice to ensure we maintain our high quality of care. The health and safety of our patients, their families and our staff remain our highest priority.

### **What is a Coronavirus? How does it spread?**

Coronaviruses are a common cause of upper respiratory infections worldwide. Most coronaviruses cause mild cold symptoms and are spread via respiratory/airborne droplet secretions, or from infected surfaces that come into contact with our eyes, nose or mouth. In rare situations, coronaviruses that infect animals can begin to infect people as well. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are caused by coronaviruses that originated from animals.

### **What is Covid-19?**

Covid-19 is the name given to the disease caused by a novel coronavirus that originated in Wuhan City, China. It is thought to have originated from an infected animal.

## What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

Symptoms range in severity, but most typically include fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath. There are reports of gastro-intestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea). Some patients may have a sore throat or no symptoms at all. Symptoms can start to improve over the first week of illness, and then rapidly worsen in the second week, so it is important to continue to monitor anyone with suspected Covid-19 closely until all symptoms are completely gone.

## What changes has CMA implemented given the current pandemic?

### 1. Separating well and sick visits:

- Well visits have been switched to the early part of the day in order to try to ensure that our newborns and healthy patients and parents are minimally exposed to any patients with respiratory illnesses. Because of this, please do not be surprised if you are asked several times - for example when you make your appointments, and again when you arrive - whether anyone in your party has had fever or cough in the past 14 days. Please be honest with us about any symptoms you or your child might be experiencing. We are trying to ensure the safety of our staff, many of whom have young families and other health problems, as well as trying to ensure the safety of our patients and their families.
- Sick visits will be in the afternoon and will be separated by respiratory and non-respiratory complaints. Because our office set up in the Fairfax office is different from that in the Alexandria office, please look for signs directing you to the correct waiting room. If you or your child are experiencing any respiratory symptoms (congestion, fever, cough) - **even if that is not the reason for your visit** - please wait in the respiratory waiting room.
- If you have a suspicion that you or your child might have Covid-19 (for example, if you have been in contact with someone who has a test pending, or have traveled) then please call us from your car once you arrive so that we can prepare for your arrival.

2. Where possible, only one parent (and no siblings or other family members) should accompany each patient into the office. We understand that in some cases there may be logistical constraints that limit this option.

3. We have removed all toys and books from our waiting rooms and examining rooms and follow CDC and DOH guidelines regarding cleaning the exam rooms between patients.

4. We have telemedicine for appropriate conditions.

5. 100% mask use is required by staff and patients at all times.

We ask that you please be patient with us if things are not as smooth as normal as we work out the kinks in our new system. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free

to reach out directly to us by phone. Our wonderful and dedicated desk nurses can provide advice and answer questions, and we continue to have provider phone time between 8am and 8:45am each weekday to answer more specific questions pertinent to your child.

### **Do you still recommend coming in for well child visits during this pandemic?**

Well visits are critically important for your child. This preventive care visit helps us to monitor your child's growth, development, and provide age-appropriate anticipatory guidance and immunizations.

After reviewing guidelines, and with the goal to continue to provide optimal care for our patients, CMA recommends continuing to come in for essential well visits, especially given that the pandemic will likely go on for several weeks or even months. Children still need to be immunized to ensure that we do not contribute to the spread of vaccine-preventable illnesses, such as measles, pertussis, meningitis, etc. To help keep healthy children safe, we are trying to see only well visits in the mornings, but we ask that you call us on the day of your appointment if **you OR your child** have developed a cough or fever to discuss how to proceed. For children who are not due for immunizations, and are otherwise healthy, we understand if you would like to defer the appointment for a few weeks, but please reach out to our office for more specific recommendations.

### **Is there anything I can do to protect my family from this illness?**

The best way to protect your family and community is to practice social distancing. What this means is trying to stay home, minimize trips out (for example, trying to obtain all necessities - such as groceries or medications - in a single trip out once a week), and having only one family member venture out to obtain any necessities. If you must go out, try to maintain a 6 ft distance from other people.

This also means no playdates, no playground trips, and isolating family members who are sick. Many parents and children are understandably going stir crazy, and as the weather changes, we do encourage going outdoors. Physical activity remains just as important as ever! You can take hikes in less populated areas, play in the yard, go for walks or bike rides or have a picnic outdoors with members of your immediate family.

In addition, it is critical to wash your hands well and often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water! Hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol is also effective. Teach your children how to wash hands effectively. You can even make this a game - pick a favorite song to sing together - and ensure children are washing between their fingers and rubbing vigorously. In particular, wash hands well after handling packages, mail, or being away from home.

## How do kids fare when they get sick with Covid-19?

The encouraging information from other countries who have experienced outbreaks is that children generally fare well. They tend to have milder illnesses, although any child with a complex health history (for example, diabetes, lung disease, autoimmune problems) is at higher risk for complications. There have been children who have required hospital support to help them fight this illness and a few rare instances of critical illness and even death. Many children who have no symptoms **may still be contagious**, which is why limiting playdates, time on playground equipment (which is very rarely wiped down) and time with vulnerable family members is still prudent.

## Does CMA offer a test for Covid-19? How is the test done?

The DOH and CDC have stringent guidelines detailing who should be tested for Covid-19 because of the current shortage of testing kits. We hope that drive-through testing options will become available in Virginia in the future. For many of our patients who have mild illness, the best recommendation if they have suspicious symptoms (such as cough and fever) is to assume they may have Covid-19 and **strictly quarantine**. Many children and adults this time of year suffer from allergies, which can present in the same way. The typical cough for Covid-19 is a dry cough, but because symptoms can be so mild and variable in children, our recommendation is to err on the side of caution. Additionally, it IS possible to have both Covid-19 AND allergies, so until more testing is available, please stay quarantined! If your child has a history of allergies, please give them their medications consistently, and if you have additional questions, give us a call!

Testing is done via a nasopharyngeal swab (similar to flu test).

## I think my child has Covid-19. What do I do?

Any child with mild symptoms who has suspected Covid-19 should be **quarantined**.

Because most children are able to get through this illness with normal supportive care, your first goal is to keep them comfortable and to watch them closely. If your child has a fever and cough, but their symptoms are controlled with normal measures (Tylenol, fluids, rest), continue to monitor them closely. They do not necessarily need to be seen, although we do encourage you to call us to discuss more specific advice pertinent to your child.

Try to avoid going to the ER for mild illness or “just to get a test”. All healthcare facilities are facing test kit shortages, and will limit testing to only those individuals for whom it is critically necessary to have a result. It is unlikely that any individual, including a child, who is symptomatic but otherwise stable will require a test. CMA is similarly following CDC/DOH guidelines, and very few children will qualify for testing. Children’s National Medical Center has made some options

available for drive-through testing, and we encourage you to call and speak with a provider about whether this is necessary for your child.

Additionally, if a family member has or may have Covid-19, you should assume all other close contacts in that household likely have it as well, and **quarantine everyone**. The CDC recommends staying isolated until all three of the following have occurred: 1) fever-free for 72 hours without the use of a fever reducing medication; 2) other symptoms are completely gone (cough, diarrhea, etc); 3) at least 7 days have passed since the symptoms first appeared. The World Health Organization has a more conservative approach and recommends staying home until 14 days after symptoms have completely resolved.

If a child is having difficulty breathing, they need rapid assessment by a healthcare provider. Call CMA to discuss what to do and where to go. If you suspect your child might have Covid-19, it is important to call any healthcare facility (our office, or an urgent care or ER) **prior to arriving**, to allow them to prepare to evaluate your child and limit your time in the waiting room where there may be other vulnerable individuals.

### **My child has questions about Covid-19. How do I discuss it without alarming them?**

The best way to discuss this with children is to keep the facts simple and age-appropriate, and remain reassuring. Children often are able to pick up on parental anxiety. Try to avoid exposing children to media (such as background television) that focuses on and sensationalizes the illness, and attempt to maintain a consistent daily routine if possible.

You can explain that Covid-19 is the name of a virus that has made many people sick, although doctors think most people (especially kids) will be okay. Discussing the symptoms of Covid-19 is reasonable, although it is important to emphasize that not every cough or fever means you have this virus. Reassure them that their doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers are working hard to help keep people healthy and safe and remind them of things they can do to help such as:

- Washing hands well
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or elbow and then throwing tissues away immediately.
- Avoid touching your face. No nose picking!
- Helping with age-appropriate chores around the house such as wiping light switches, doorknobs, fridge handles, and other high traffic areas.
- Avoiding people who are sick.
- Wear a mask.

### **Help! School is cancelled for the rest of the year! What do I do with my children?**

Children thrive on structure, and with school out for the next several months, we understand the temptation to let them stay up late, sleep in, stay in their pajamas all day, and watch TV or browse online to their hearts content! In the long-term, however, these habits are detrimental

and could lead to poor sleep, emotional dysregulation, and general unhappiness (for everyone concerned!).

Try to create a routine for weekdays. Maintain consistent wakeup and bedtimes, and provide some structured time for learning during the day. It is okay to create some flexibility in your schedule based on your family needs, but as much as possible, try to provide an outline of what to expect from day to day. Your routine should include specific time for learning, physical activity, and creative play and relaxation. Children are used to having a significant amount of social interaction each day at school, so allowing them time to connect with friends or family (such as via Zoom or FaceTime) will also help maintain some sense of normalcy.

Many schools are providing lessons online. There are also many community resources, such as online tours from museums (<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>) and national parks (<https://techcrunch.com/2016/08/25/google-now-lets-you-explore-u-s-national-parks-via-360-degree-virtual-tours/>).

Hands on activities such as puzzles, legos, and arts and crafts also provide an important form of learning. Encourage reading, or listening to audiobooks if possible, and social play (such as board games, or baking together). Several online education and activity resources are available from Scholastic and Crayola. Depending on your child's interests, they can also Skype a Scientist (<https://www.skypeascientist.com>), or learn to draw with Mo Willems daily at 1pm EST (<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/>) or do some yoga (<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>).

We will all be tempted to allow more screen time than our children would normally have. As in most things, balance is essential.

### **Should we change our travel plans? Should we avoid visiting grandparents?**

Yes. The vast majority of people who become seriously ill are over the age 60, and because children and young adults can have very mild or even no symptoms, the safest thing is to try to ensure social isolation for the elderly. Allow children to FaceTime with their grandparents instead!

### **When will things go back to normal?**

Unfortunately, at this point it is hard to tell. The more consistently we practice social distancing, the lower the surge of sick people requiring hospitalization in the next few weeks. We are still in a phase of the epidemic where we can expect exponential increase in our case numbers. Keep in mind that the effect of any intervention (such as social isolation) can only be seen about 2 weeks after that intervention begins. Based on the information from other countries such as China or Italy, this will likely be the new normal for several weeks or even months, although we may see different patterns from state to state.

**Other helpful resources:**

American Academy of Pediatrics (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>)

CDC Covid-19 symptom checker (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/index.html>).

Child Mind Institute (<https://childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/>)

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