

# Coronavirus – Information to support children and young people

## Advice for parents and carers

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*Reports regarding Coronavirus have been prevalent in the media recently, and it is natural for children and young people to have questions or concerns when events such as this occur. 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

It is perfectly normal for children to have questions about events that are covered in the media, such as the information currently being distributed about Coronavirus.

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. This will help them feel informed and understand what is happening.

It is important to emphasise that even though there is a very small number of cases of the virus in Australia, the likelihood of them coming into contact with the virus is still very, very low. It is important for children to understand that we are lucky to live in a country where students will be able to access immediate and high quality medical attention. Also, it is important children understand the low risk of serious illness.

Encourage children to engage in things that help them to feel better.

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 is 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 there is no cause for alarm.

#### 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:

- As of 1 February, there were just 12 confirmed cases of the Coronavirus in Australia. The overwhelming majority of the cases are in China, with most of those from Hubei province, where the outbreak began.
- The most serious cases have occurred overseas, not in Australia.



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 the affected areas has been restricted, and scientists are working to develop a vaccine. In Australia, the government is carefully monitoring and actively managing the situation and the risk to the public here remains very low. Children should be confident any confirmed cases will be treated quickly in our world class hospitals.

**4. Finally, offer practical advice.**

For the time being the easiest way to reduce the risk of being affected by viruses of any sort (including the common cold) is to cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze (coughing into your elbow is a useful strategy), keep hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub, and avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth. These are easy habits for children to adopt, and 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 be 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.

## 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 headspace's [tips for a healthy headspace for friends and family](#), 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.

