



## **Prevention of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Recommendations for Parents**

Since the emergence of a cluster of viral pneumonia cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province, People's Republic of China at the end of December 2019, caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), also known as “**coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)**”, The disease was recognized by World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020. As of 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020, more than 2,241,359 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in more than 200 countries and territories, resulting in more than 152,551 deaths. This new coronavirus is highly infectious and can effectively spread between people. Some features of this emerging infection are summarized below:

### **Transmission and Incubation Period**

This novel coronavirus can be transmitted through droplets and contact. The incubation period can last for up to 14 days. The virus is spread mainly from person-to-person. Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely play a significant role in the spread of COVID-19.

### **Clinical Symptoms**

The main symptoms are fever, cough, runny nose, and occasionally loss of smell sensation (anosmia), diarrhoea or shortness of breath. This infection causes pneumonia, severe respiratory infections and even death. According to the current evidence, most severe cases occur in adults and elderly with weakened immunity or chronic illnesses. On the other hand, COVID-19 patients may have minimal respiratory symptoms in particular during the early stage of infection.

### **Treatment**

No vaccine is currently available to prevent this coronavirus. There is also no effective therapy for this virus at this moment.

## **Measures that Parents Need to Pay Attention to Prevent COVID-19**

### **1. Education**

- Explain to your child about the current situation of this epidemic so that they understand why and how to take preventive measures. Parents can refer to the children's educational materials.
- Anti-epidemic buddies: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J3mAE8cz29-lTplusigycejb9zi\\_3NRv/view?fbclid=IwAR3hYAq\\_bh-T3PNkygT5vAmO-31PBXG0g\\_mYQ7XjHN59bn2jtDAYsEQxUY](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J3mAE8cz29-lTplusigycejb9zi_3NRv/view?fbclid=IwAR3hYAq_bh-T3PNkygT5vAmO-31PBXG0g_mYQ7XjHN59bn2jtDAYsEQxUY).

## **2. Daily observation**

- Observe your child daily for symptoms such as cough and runny nose.
- Measure body temperature with an ear thermometer every day. Normal body temperature is 36.5-37.5°C. Our body temperature fluctuates around 37°C, and everyone's normal temperature will be slightly different. Find out the normal temperature of each child will help judge whether he/she has fever or not. For example, take the child's temperature every morning for a week when he/she is well. This can find out his/her average normal body temperature. Most children's body temperature is around 36.5-37.5°C. Parents can use this average reading to evaluate whether your child has fever or not.
- It is extremely inaccurate and unreliable to feel body temperature by touching the forehead.
- If you suspect your child has a fever, you can repeat the measurement. If the body temperature is consistently higher than the average body temperature and there are other symptoms such as cough and runny nose, please help your child wear a mask then take him/ her to attend a doctor.

## **3. Personal hygiene**

- Teach your child to pay attention to personal hygiene and wash hands frequently. Hand hygiene should be done before and after meals, after using the toilet and after touching unclean objects. Wash hands with handwash and water and remember to clean fingers and wrists. Hand washing should last for at least 20 seconds. If washing hand with water is not possible and there is no obvious dirt on your hands, your child can clean his/her hands with a 70-80% alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth without thoroughly cleaning the hands.
- Teach your child to put the toilet lid down before flushing, then clean his/her hands thoroughly.
- Teach your child to cover the nose and mouth with a tissue paper when coughing or sneezing and then carefully discard the tissue paper into a covered trash bin. Thoroughly clean the hands afterwards.

## **4. Household hygiene**

- Maintain good air ventilation at home.
- Children should have their own personal tableware, drinking and mouthwash cups, toothbrushes and towels. They should not share personal belongings with other children or adults.
- Clean your home with 1:99 diluted household bleach daily.
- Clean children's toys with 1:99 diluted household bleach daily and rinse the toys thoroughly afterwards.
- Ensure U-traps drainage pipes are filled with water by pouring water to each drainage outlet daily.

## 5. **Maintain social distancing - Stay at home as much as possible**

- Given the possibility of community transmission of novel coronavirus, family members should avoid going to crowded places or participating in mass gathering.
- Children should stay at home during school suspension. You are strongly advised against taking your child to group extracurricular activities, playground, etc.
- Equally importantly, parents should suspend children's participation in interest classes or tutorials to reduce the possibility of cross infection.
- Parents should avoid allowing visitors to home as far as possible.
- Always adhere to social distancing principle and avoid children's all non-essential encounters with non-household members.
- Parents should arrange appropriate learning and play activities for their children at home.
- If there is a genuine need to go out, one should wear a surgical mask when leaving the residence. In circumstances when surgical mask is not available, Center of Disease Control (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings.
- All surgical masks should only be used once, which should be disposed in a covered trash bin. Remember to clean your hands thoroughly after disposal.
- If there is a genuine need to go out for some leisure activities, children and their families should go to a less crowded place such as the countryside.

## 6. **When travelling**

- Avoid visiting areas with reported COVID-19 cases.
- Avoid contact with wild animals or birds. Do not visit live poultry markets or farms, wet markets, or eat wild animals. If you feel unwell after returning to Hong Kong, you should wear a surgical mask and seek medical advice immediately. Remember to report your accurate travel history within 14 days before onset of your illness.

## 7. **When your child is unwell**

- If your child has symptoms such as persistent fever, cough and runny nose, you should help him/her wear an appropriate children's mask (cover both nose, mouth and chin) and bring your child to see a doctor. There is evidence to support the wearing of surgical mask during illness can protect others against contracting respiratory illness.
- Proper handling and disposal of your child's napkin or excreta is an important infection control measure.
- Truthfully report children's symptoms, contact history and travel history (including family and caregivers) to the medical personnel.

## **Questions or Misunderstanding about COVID-19**

### **Question 1: Should I put on surgical mask despite I have no symptom and well?**

**Answer:** There exists the risk of COVID-19 infection spreading within the densely populated community in Hong Kong, and recent evidence from confirmed local cases clearly supported sustained human-to-human transmission. A recent article on the detection of SARS-CoV-2 that causes COVID-2019 in saliva supported the importance of wearing surgical mask to prevent this

infection. Children and adolescents should wear surgical masks in crowded or public places even if they are asymptomatic so as to protect them against COVID-19. Besides, COVID-19 patients may be asymptomatic or only have mild respiratory symptoms in the early stage (subclinical) who can serve as a source of COVID-19 transmission. In circumstances when surgical mask is not available, CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.<sup>6-7</sup>

Surgical mask or cloth face coverings should not be used on infants and those children with trouble breathing, incapacitated or if the covering poses a possible choking or strangulation hazard or otherwise the child is unable to remove the mask without assistance.

**Question 2: How to wear a surgical mask correctly?**

**Answer:** Proper wearing of surgical masks can prevent respiratory infections and prevent the spread of this new virus. When wearing the mask, it should be kept close to the face, with the colored side facing outward. The mask should completely cover nose, mouth and chin. The metal edge should be pressed tightly along the bridge of the nose. The mask should be changed every day and discarded into a covered trash bin.

For effective protection against COVID-19 infection, the use of surgical mask must be paired with proper hand hygiene procedures: before putting on the mask, after touching it or after removal of the mask.

**Question 3: Can surgical masks be reused?**

**Answer:** The design of surgical mask does not allow repeated use because pathogens stay on the filter layer which filters bacteria and viruses which can infect the user. As the innermost layer is used to absorb users' mouth and nose discharge, repeated use of the mask is extremely unhygienic. In addition, do not use alcohol or chemical to damage the outer filter layer.

**Question 4: Can pets be infected with the new coronavirus?**

**Answer:** Recent evidence showed that this new virus was identified in household dog and cat. Although there is no scientific evidence to suggest transmission through pets, hand hygiene is always recommended after contact with pets as they can spread other bacteria such as Salmonella.

**Question 5: Are children having less chance of infection by this novel coronavirus?**

**Answer:** The confirmed cases reported around the world currently are mainly adults and elderly people, and most of them suffer from chronic illnesses. However, increasing number of confirmed children cases have been reported world widely and locally. Due to the potential risks of community transmission in Hong Kong, and that children's awareness of epidemic prevention and personal protection is not as high as adults, it is vitally important to stay vigilant and adhere to the preventive measures.

**Question 6: Is it possible to sterilize and reuse surgical masks by steaming?**

**Answer:** High temperature and moisture will damage the material of the mask and render it useless. Never try to steam and reuse masks.

**Question 7: Does taking child health supplements help to prevent this new infection?**

**Answer:** Parents may spend a lot on child health supplements. In fact, there is no scientific evidence to prove their preventive effect. On the contrary, maintaining children's healthy lifestyle such as having a healthy diet, eating fresh fruits and vegetables, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep are the best way to boost their immunity.

**References**

1. Anti-epidemic buddies: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J3mAE8cz29-ITplusigycejb9zi\\_3NRv/view?fbclid=IwAR3hYAq\\_bh-T3PNkygT5vAmO-31PBXG0g\\_mYQ7XjHN59bn2itDAYsEzQxUY](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J3mAE8cz29-ITplusigycejb9zi_3NRv/view?fbclid=IwAR3hYAq_bh-T3PNkygT5vAmO-31PBXG0g_mYQ7XjHN59bn2itDAYsEzQxUY).
2. For the latest health information on COVID-19, please refer to the Center for Health Protection thematic webpage: <https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html>
3. COVID-19 - Update on Hong Kong. <https://chp-dashboard.geodata.gov.hk/nia/zh.html>.
4. World Health Organization - Coronavirus (COVID-19) Global Real-Time Notification Number of Infections: <https://covid19.who.int/>
5. Tips for parenting during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips>
6. Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission. Centre for Disease Control (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>
7. HealthyChildren.org. American Academy of Pediatrics. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

This Recommendation is prepared jointly by Hong Kong College of Paediatricians and Hong Kong Society for Paediatric Immunology Allergy and Infectious Diseases

5<sup>th</sup> February 2020

19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (updated version)