

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – information for those living with childhood type 1 diabetes

All of you will be fully aware of the new coronavirus impacting the world and increasingly New Zealand. All of us collectively are deeply concerned about these developments. In response to the many calls and discussions we have had in past days, we have put together this information sheet to highlight what we know about COVID-19, and specifically what we currently know about implications for children and families living with type 1 diabetes.

What is it?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses. Most of them cause illness in animals, but several known types of coronaviruses cause illness in humans. SARS-CoV-2 is one of those viruses – it causes the illness COVID-19.

What are the symptoms?

People who are confirmed to have COVID-19 by a laboratory test have had respiratory illness ranging from mild to severe and similar to influenza (aches and pains, fever, coughing) which in more severe cases progresses to shortness of breath. Vomiting, and sore throat occur, but nasal congestion, and diarrhoea are less common.

Based on how long it took between a first and second case in a contact group from China, symptoms normally begin about 4 days after exposure to the virus. Once infected a person may take days to weeks to fully recover. Worryingly children may remain infectious (shedding the virus) for many days, potentially even 2-3 weeks – which will have important implications for school and daycare return.

While it seems most people under 20 years of age who become infected have minimal symptoms, severe illness can rarely occur, especially younger children (especially in infants under one year of age), those with underlying immune compromise, and those with previous respiratory conditions,

Experience in China to date has not shown / does not suggest any additional risk for children with well-controlled diabetes, with no other significant associated complications compared with other healthy children.

What actions should I take?

Since the virus causing COVID-19 is new, a vaccine to prevent it hasn't been developed yet. Key recommendations for preventing the spread of all respiratory illnesses include:

- 1) Obtain annual influenza vaccine for your child and the rest of your family from your GP as soon as it becomes available – influenza vaccine for children with diabetes is free of charge but there may be a charge for other family members.
- 2) Hand washing/Hygiene: washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; not touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; avoiding close contact with people who are sick; staying at home when you are sick; and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- 3) Make sure you are prepared for isolation by ensuring you have adequate medical supplies and consumables available, including access to blood ketone testing strips.

Overall, people living with type 1 diabetes are at no higher risk of contracting coronavirus, but some, especially those who are older or with other underlying conditions, are at risk of more severe illness if infected.

Everyone in the community is encouraged to follow government advice closely to minimise risk for their household and minimise transmission across the population. Please follow this advice, including the use of [social distancing measures](#).

What should I do if I have any symptoms?

It is important if you have symptoms such as a new continuous cough and high temperature that you do not panic but follow Public Health guidelines to stay home in isolation. If you live with other people, they should stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person gets symptoms.

If unwell, for COVID-19 health advice and information, contact the Healthline team (for free) on 0800 358 5453.

Ensure you continue to monitor your Child's blood glucose and implement your [sick day rules](#), checking for ketones more closely. Contact your diabetes specialist team if you feel you need additional support for your diabetes.

Always contact Healthline team for advice before presenting in person to GP or Diabetes/Hospital Health services.

Additional information

[Latest health advice on COVID-19 \(novel coronavirus\) from the Ministry of Health](#)

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public>

Type 1 diabetes and sickness: <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/managing-children-diabetes-when-they-get-sick>