

Please see the following advice from Dr Miriam Stoppard when talking to children about the coronavirus, which was recently published in a national newspaper. It may be helpful.

“How to talk to your children about the outbreak

There’s no way your children can escape the knowledge that we’re in the throes of an epidemic. It will be talked about in school, on social media and the likelihood is they’ll pick up on your anxiety.

Even though you’re apprehensive about the epidemic your children are not. You have it within your power to instil in your child calm realism. Because a lot of the news is good. Most cases are mild, only the elderly are vulnerable and fatalities are rare.

What’s behind your children’s questions?

Your child’s anxiety may stem from the idea of something nasty happening to them. You are in a strong position to reassure them.

Guidelines for answers

- Find out where they have heard about the virus so that you’re in a position to be optimistic about the future. That is, very few children get the disease and people of your age generally only get mild symptoms.
- Do tell the truth. If your child thinks you’re dodging the truth or fudging the answer this will lead to anxiety.
- You can say that people are having screening tests to make sure they don’t have the coronavirus and if they do they can be isolated so they don’t spread it to others.

Here are some suggested answers to your children’s questions according to their age group: -

Age 2 – 4 It’s unlikely they will ask anything more searching than what’s a virus? Your answer can be equally simple – it’s an illness that’s sometimes serious sometimes not.

Age 4 – 6 We’re being very good at finding out who has the infection and making sure they don’t spread it to other people. That’s why it’s important to wash your hands often and not to touch your face. It’s also why we aren’t travelling on trains and planes.

Age 6 - 8 When a virus spreads in our town it’s called an epidemic and when it spreads around the world the name is pandemic. The infection is different in different people. It’s like, for instance, when we have a cold it gets better in a couple of days, but if you get flu you could be in bed for a longer time.

Not everyone who gets the virus needs to go to hospital but they may need to stay in their room so that they don’t spread the infection. If we obey all the rules it’s unlikely that anyone in our family will catch the virus.

Age 8 – 11 You’re unlikely to catch the virus and so are mum and dad. Should we get it, it’s likely to be quite mild illness like a dose of flu and you’re unlikely to get it because children seem to be immune to the virus.

Older people are vulnerable so we’re keeping an eye on granny and grandad to make sure if they catch it we can get them to hospital quickly. We’re working on a vaccine, which could be ready in less than a year.”