

# COVID-19: Plans for Families with Children

Families with children should create a plan for what will happen if the caregiver or caregivers in the family become ill with COVID-19. A Covid-19 Family Plan should establish a Circle of Support which includes family members, friends, and other trusted people who can help care for children.

## What to do if you are sick

COVID-19 is a very infectious disease and those with COVID-19 should limit how much they interact with others. The State of Alaska recommends that individuals with any symptoms, even mild, get tested as quickly as possible (by calling their provider or local public health or tribal health clinic). Those who test positive, or [who have symptoms and are waiting for COVID-19 test results](#), should self-isolate from others in their household (in a separate room and with a separate bathroom, if possible).

Single parents, households in which the other parent/caregiver is away, households in which both parents/caregivers are sick, parents who are breastfeeding an infant, and others can have difficulties self-isolating. The CDC recommends that when a household member with COVID-19 cannot self-isolate, that they wear a cloth face covering or mask around others, and that they wash hands and disinfect surfaces and door handles often.

If the children have health conditions that put them at greater risk, or if the parent/caregiver becomes too sick to care for the children, it is important to have a plan for alternate care of the children, which includes a Circle of Support.

## 1 Identify your Circle of Support

A Circle of Support is a group of people that a parent or caregiver can call upon to provide short- or long-term child care in case they become sick, or have other complications which restrict them from caring for their child.

For many families, grandparents are the go-to people to help with children. But people over the age of 60 are at a high risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Other go-to caregivers in a family's life may also have [health issues](#) that put them at a greater risk of having severe illness if they contract COVID-19.

During COVID-19, parents need to identify a Circle of Support that includes people who are NOT at a higher risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19. Family members like aunts, uncles, cousins and older siblings may be included in the Circle of Support. Family friends the child is familiar and comfortable with can be part of the Circle of Support, or the parents of your children's friends. What is important is that:

- Your child feels safe and comfortable with them
- You trust them
- They are not in a high-risk category for COVID-related complications (page 3)
- They are close by

## Symptoms of COVID-19

Fever



Sputum



Cough



Muscle pain



Fatigue



Shortness of breath



Loss of appetite



Reduction in sense of smell or taste



## 2 Plan ahead with your Circle of Support

- Practice communication, decide how to get in touch
- Share a key or door code with a trusted person
- Share location of your child's COVID go-bag
- Share copies of emergency plan
- Have a list of support network members visible in your home
- Check in on a regular basis with your Circle of Support to make sure they can continue to support

## 3 Know when to activate your plan

In addition to the issues discussed above about when to contact your Circle of Support, it's important to stay in regular contact with your health care provider and/or the Public Health Nurse if you have tested positive or have symptoms.

Also, if you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19, you need to get medical attention immediately—meaning call 911 or go to an emergency room. Emergency warning signs include\*:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

\*This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

## 4 Find help outside your Circle of Support

If no one in your Circle of Support can help, there are other resources in your community that may be available to provide support.

First, think about places you are already connected to, such as your child's school or sports teams, your local faith community, or your family's tribal community. There may be people beyond your initial circle who would be willing to step in to care for your child.

There are other community resources that may be an option:

**Safe Families for Children Alaska** offers volunteer host families who are trained to take care of children during a family emergency. Available in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Soldotna, Homer, and Fairbanks. 24 hr. helpline 907-277-0925 or [safefamilies@beaconhillak.com](mailto:safefamilies@beaconhillak.com)

[Choosing Our Roots](#) provides safe homes and supportive communities for LGBTQ youth in Anchorage and the Mat-Su, and is working to make them available in other regions. There are also youth shelters in a few communities in Alaska, including [Covenant House](#) in Anchorage, [My House](#) in the Mat-Su Valley, and [The Door](#) in Fairbanks.

For other regions of Alaska and other resources, including temporary shelters for children, [call 211](#) or, if it's after hours, call Safe Families for Children Alaska at 907-277-0925.

## COVID-19 go-bags

- **Child's identification**—School ID, birth certificate, other
- **List of emergency contacts**—Close relatives, teachers, doctors, or other caregivers
- **List of contact information**—People the child may communicate with on a regular basis to help the child feel connected and alleviate the stress of separation
- **Phone and device chargers**
- **Multiple outfits**—Two or more days' worth of clothing, undergarments and appropriate outdoor wear
- **Comfort items**—Blankets, stuffed animals, family pictures, or items that will bring the child comfort
- **Medications and other medical or disability-related supplies/equipment**
- **School supplies**—A description of at-home assignments, and a list of online education platforms. Include online education platforms usernames and passwords
- **Breastmilk or formula**—Or instructions on where to find this in the fridge/freezer, and other infant feeding items, if applicable
- **Additional instructions**—Dietary restrictions, allergy information, behavioral strategies, routines, and other relevant information

During the COVID-19 crisis children may be feeling overwhelmed. In addition to all of the other changes occurring, some kids may feel scared by the thought that their caregiver/s may not be able to care for them. Others will be reassured that their caregiver/s have a plan in case they become sick. Every parent should determine what is the best course of action for when and whether to talk with their child about this plan. Parents and caregivers may find this guide helpful: [Tips for how to talk to kids about the Coronavirus](#)



## Grandparents or other elders raising children

Many children in Alaska are being raised by grandparents and others who are at higher risk with COVID-19. It is important to protect all members of these families from the virus by sheltering at home, making sure that the children do not physically interact with other children, and asking neighbors or others for help for grocery shopping and other errands. If an older caregiver begins to have symptoms of COVID-19, they may want to notify their Circle of Support at an even earlier point.



## Co-parenting situations

For families in which there is a shared custody agreement and where children live in multiple homes, this plan will likely need to be set up between the two homes. Some things to consider:

- The regular co-parenting plan may need to change based on the symptoms, test results, and level of medical care needed by one or both of the parents
- The Circle of Support may begin with the other parent but should include other options as well
- Make sure that the health, well-being, and safety of the children are at the center of your plan
- Make sure that your children do not have to witness or be involved in conflict about the plan
- For guidance on co-parenting during this stressful time, see the new Alaska [webpage on families and COVID](#)

## More information

For more discussion of these issues, including how to assign temporary guardianship:

- Article in the New York Times: [“When Parents Get Sick, Who Cares for the Kids?”](#)
- Helpful emergency planning documents: [Fillable form—General Family Emergency Planning](#)
- [Fillable form—Medical Summary](#)

## High risk individuals

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions
- People who are immunocompromised
- Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease