# Briefing 2019/2020

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5 tips for families in protecting their child from COVID-19[1]

COVID-19 infection has been reported in children of all ages, however case numbers seem to be far lower than in adults. Current evidence suggests that they generally experience a milder form of illness than adults, with most infected children presenting with mild symptoms or none at all.

As schools and nurseries in England widen their offer from June 1, one question that many parents are asking is: "what can I do to keep my children safe?".

Make hand washing fun

Teaching your children how to wash their hands properly with soap and water is a really simple, yet effective way, to help keep them safe. There are four simple steps for effective hand washing in the diagram below. You could print this off and stick on the bathroom mirror as an easy reminder for everyone to wash their hands more often.
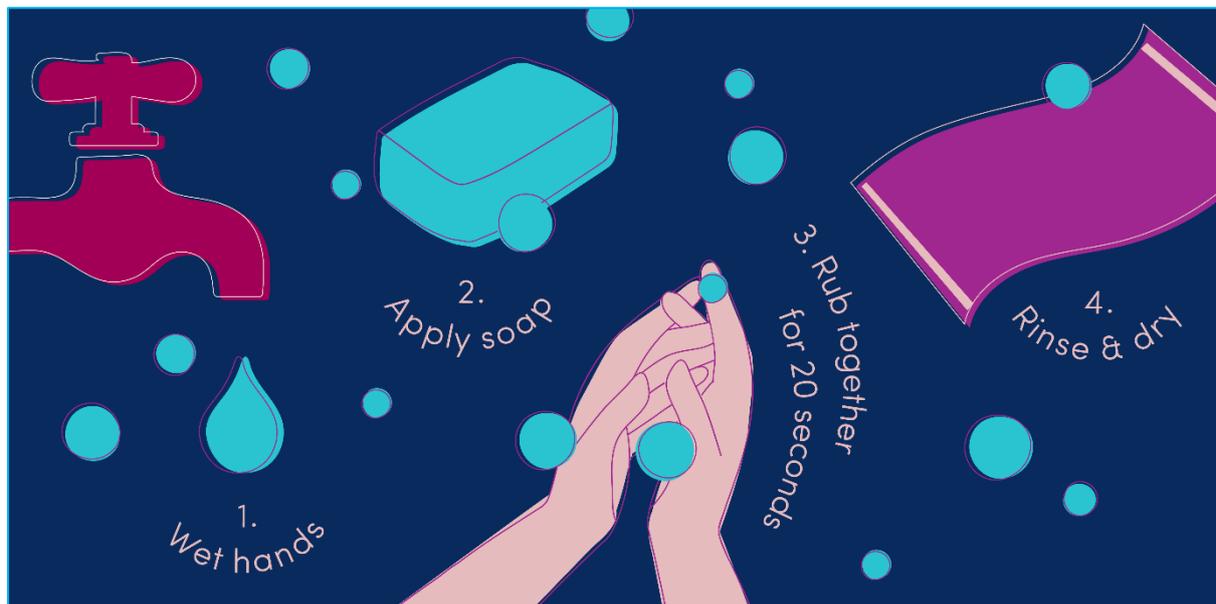
The best way to get your little ones to do this is by making hand washing more exciting. Encourage them to sing their favourite song as they wash their hands. Tell them that by washing their hands, they're like superheroes that are doing what they can to beat the bad guys.

Above all, be patient. It takes time for children to learn how to master a new skill and get into the habit of doing it. Remind them that you are there to help when they need it.

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[1] With thanks to the information published by the Covid Symptom Study.

Lead by example

A little can go a long way when it comes to teaching and reinforcing basic measures that can help protect your kids. Children learn from the adults around them. By making a habit of regularly washing your own hands, avoiding people who are coughing and sneezing, and throwing away tissues after using them, your little ones will be more likely to practice what you teach them.

Test their smell

A new loss of taste and smell (anosmia) have now been added to the UK's official list of COVID-19 symptoms. Losing your sense of smell or taste may be a stronger predictor of coronavirus infection than fever.

Keeping track of any changes to your child's sense of smell may be a good way to identify coronavirus infection early. Mealtimes are a great time to test this out. You could encourage food exploration by asking them what they can smell, taste, and see on their plate. Alternatively, if you have the time and resources, you could even turn it into a game using some of these ideas.

Make sure to also keep an eye out for other common COVID-19 symptoms including fever and a new, continuous cough. If you see any sign of illness consistent with coronavirus infection, make sure to follow NHS guidance by keeping your child at home and away from others.

Encourage outdoor play where possible

Returning to school will be challenging for many children after spending weeks without interaction with their peers. Even more so if they aren't allowed to play with one another.

Lockdown and social distancing measures have played an important role in curbing the spread of COVID-19. However, a number of child mental health experts are urging that the social and emotional wellbeing of children is prioritised in decisions made around the reopening of schools.

Play teaches children how to regulate their emotions, form a sense of identity, and develop important social skills. Outdoor play and learning, which we know have a number of mental and physical health benefits, should be encouraged where schools have the facilities. Encouraging outdoor play, either in pairs or within small 'social bubbles', may help reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection.

Listen to them

Your child may be feeling worried or concerned about the things that they see, hear, or read regarding coronavirus. As they return to school, they will be exposed to information and opinions shared by their peers and teachers. As a parent or caregiver, it's important to reassure them that you are there to listen to them when they feel scared or unsure about the things that they're hearing. You don't need to have all the answers, but just knowing that it is safe to talk to you about their concerns can help them feel calm.

- Talking to your child about coronavirus (Young Minds)

- Talking to your children about the coronavirus pandemic (Mental Health Foundation)