

Talking to Children About a Viral Outbreak

Children may be unsettled or afraid when they hear about news of a viral outbreak. Common reactions include:

- ▶ **Fear:** “What if I get sick, or someone else does?”
- ▶ **Helplessness:** “There’s nothing I can do about any of this.”
- ▶ **Confusion:** “What is happening? I don’t understand this.”
- ▶ **Anger:** “Why did adults let this happen?”
- ▶ **Guilt:** “I did something to cause this.”

Your child may also “act out” or exhibit the following behaviors:

- ▶ Crying, whining, or becoming upset easily
- ▶ Aggressive or oppositional behavior
- ▶ Bedwetting, sleep disturbances, thumb-sucking, tantrums
- ▶ Unusually quiet, reclusive, or disinterested in activities or friends (may be especially noticeable in teenagers)
- ▶ Clinginess or fear of being separated from a parent or other loved one
- ▶ Changes in eating or sleep habits

These tips may help you address your child’s fears about the viral outbreak:



- ▶ Explain to your child that while the illness is frightening, most people will recover from it
- ▶ Talk to your child about the importance of washing her or his hands, covering sneezes and coughs, and cleaning surfaces
- ▶ Let your child know you will do everything you can to keep him or her safe
- ▶ Tell your child that there is nothing wrong with getting sick, and that you will take care of him or her if it happens
- ▶ Encourage your child to talk about their worries or fears and ask questions
- ▶ Limit exposure to news reports and other media outlets

For more suggestions on how to help children cope with fears related to an illness or other health concern, contact LifeMatters. Help is available 24/7/365.

Call **LifeMatters®** by Empathia toll-free anytime. **1-800-367-7474**

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