

COVID-19 Current Topics: 5-13-20

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been flooded with information; and the information seems to be ever changing. At PAA, we are constantly reading to stay up to date with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). As of late, we are getting many more parent calls about current recommendations as our government began the plan to “Open Texas.” We wanted to take a moment to provide updates of the current COVID-19 recommendations in response to our most common parent questions.

Do we still have to practice social distancing?

Unfortunately, the answer is yes. “The key to slowing the spread of COVID-19 is to limit contact as much as possible.” While we do not love to have to give this advice, the CDC still states that “children should not have in-person playdates with children from other households. If children are playing outside their own homes, it is essential that they remain 6 feet from anyone who is not in their own household.” They remind us that “if children meet in groups, it can put everyone at risk,” since their symptoms may be milder or go unnoticed, enabling them to pass the virus on to others. Those most at risk of significant illness are still “older adults and people who have serious underlying medical conditions.”

I’m worried about my kids. When does it make sense to take the risk of allowing them to be around their peers for the sake of their mental health?

Children and teens lives are centered around their friends, so we know that keeping them from their friends can affect mental health. Not only is their physical health is of utmost importance, but their mental health is also at the top of our minds. One common parent question is about allowing teens to gather with other teens from a distance for the sake of mental health. This is an incredibly difficult question to answer. On the one hand, we would love to advise our families that it would be okay to allow teens to gather from a distance. And in some instances, where the child/teen’s mental health is suffering, this may be reasonable, if the teen is agreeable to take the recommended precautions very seriously. This being said, we have to keep in mind that the CDC still advises us to stay more than 6 feet away from those who do not live in our household, unless the activity is an essential activity. Useful information from the CDC on stress and coping is found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>. Also, this video on “How To Support Your Teen During Social Distancing” we found to be very beneficial for parents of teens; though the topic is geared more toward girls, much of it applies to males as well: <https://www.girlology.com/programs/lf-019-hina-j-talib-v01mp4-330517>

What about travel? Summer is coming up and we’d love to not have to cancel more trips.

This pandemic has affected travel plans for all of us and unfortunately will likely continue to affect travel going forward. As of today, we are continuing to pass on the CDC recommendations to stay home and minimize non-essential travel. Their recommendations are constantly evolving, and you can check for updates here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html>. Other alternatives, to air or bus travel, such as camping should have less risk but do still post some risk. Choosing a campsite where your family is not sharing public facilities is the best choice.

What about seeing grandparents?

Again, while we hate advising loved ones to be separated, it is still the CDC’s recommendation to “consider postponing visits or trip to see older family members and grandparents.” The individuals who are at highest risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 are those who are over 65, are immunocompromised, and who have chronic illnesses. Unfortunately, this is the category many grandparents fall into. When phone calls, video calls, and letters, are not sufficient and your grandparent(s) lives nearby, a drive by visit where individuals are separated across the yard can provide needed reassurance of seeing your loved ones face in person.

What about camps?

This is an area that is still up in the air for many and only time will tell if the camps that are scheduled for June or later will be cancelled. If your child is enrolled in a camp that is still planning to occur, we recommend parents asking the camp what precautions they will be taking. If the parent views the camp precautions as comprehensive and safe, then each family will need to decide if it is in the child and family's best interest in light of any potential risks, for the child to attend camp. We know this will be a hard decision for many families.

What about childcare and daycare settings?

Many of our parents have essential jobs which requires them to leave home to go into the office, which means that their children need childcare outside the home. We recommend that each parent discuss with the childcare setting the precautions they are taking. The recommended child care guidelines from the CDC are found here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html#open>.

When will PAA get antibody or antigen testing for COVID-19? Will it be available for children? What do we think these tests will be able to tell us?

This is a great question that we are asked often. The short answer is that we don't yet know. The reason these tests are not readily available is because there is an extensive testing process that must be approved by the FDA. (Most FDA testing is first conducted for adults and then on children. So, while testing is available for some adults, it is not yet widely available for children.) We want to provide our patients with a test that has a high reliability by a company that has the technology to produce a quality test. Our lab manager has been working with our lab suppliers for weeks to determine when we can offer these tests to our patients. As soon as these tests are available for our office, we will send out another email newsletter.

A follow-up question, not asked by many parents, but one which we think is important is: Do we think this type of testing will be helpful? Our answer is: we are optimistic that it will offer useful information once we are given all the information on interpretation of the results. However, we do know that this type of serology testing will have limitations. We don't know all the information of false positives and false negatives related to COVID19 testing. A false positive result could be due to previous infection with another coronavirus type such as those responsible for the common cold. When we have answers to these questions, have access to administer the test, and feel comfortable with interpreting results, we will let you know.

What can we do to help with anxiety and boredom that comes with COVID-19?

- Take breaks from social media and screens. Though they offer some great information, having media-free time can help us not get overwhelmed.
- Focus on the positive. There are so many things we are all doing SO WELL. Our community is doing a great job with social distancing and practicing good techniques to prevent spread of illness. Please continue to look for the good and praise each other when we see it.
- Rest well! Studies show that when we are well rested our bodies do a better job fighting illness. Remember, watching screens the hour before bed can deter our ability to fall asleep. Try to stay off all screens the hour before bed. Maybe take a long shower or bath.
- Do things you love! If you have not done this yet, take up a new hobby. Play Pictionary or do charades as a family. Learn to paint, do pottery, or build something. Building a bird feeder or house is a fun project to do as a family and it makes the birds happy too.
- Go for a hike and explore new areas outdoors. We live in a wonderful city with so many cool outdoor areas to explore. Go see them!
- Keep or start exercising. As it is getting hotter outside, if your kids don't want to exercise outdoors, there are some great YouTube dance and workout videos that are family friendly.
- Learn new recipes and teach your kids how to cook.
- Use technology in positive ways such as spending time on FaceTime with friends and family. If we can see our loved ones, it helps us remember we are all in this together and are not alone.

Where can I find credible information online

- Our website, on the COVID-19 Tab
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>
- Girlology TV: How To Support Your Teen During Social Distancing
<https://www.girlology.com/programs/lf-019-hina-j-talib-v01mp4-330517>
- <http://austintexas.gov/department/health>

References:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-in-the-us.html>
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>
- <https://dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/opentexas.aspx>
- <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/fda-voices/insight-fdas-revised-policy-antibody-tests-prioritizing-access-and-accuracy>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/general-information.html>