

# **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – updated information for those living with childhood type 1 diabetes**

All of you will be fully aware of the impact COVID-19 has had on New Zealand and the world since it first emerged in China in late 2019. All of us collectively are deeply concerned about these developments and the impacts this has had on all our lives. We have put together this information sheet to highlight what we know about COVID-19, and specifically what we currently know about implications for children and families living with type 1 diabetes.

## **What is it?**

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause respiratory illnesses. Most of them cause illness in animals, but several known types of coronaviruses cause illness in humans. SARS-CoV-2 is one of those viruses – it causes the illness COVID-19.

As you will likely be aware from the media the SARS-CoV-2 virus has undergone genetic mutations over time as it adapts to humans. This is common with many viruses including the flu. The most common variants causing illness in New Zealand (and worldwide) are the Omicron and Delta variants. Both appear to more easily spread than the original virus, and Omicron currently represents the vast majority of cases worldwide. While it appears this variant is less severe, it clearly spreads more easily, meaning for now all standard advice for COVID-19 remains largely unchanged.

## **What are the symptoms?**

People who are confirmed to have COVID-19 (including all past and future variants) by a laboratory test (or soon a rapid antigen test or RAT) have had respiratory illness ranging from mild to severe and similar to influenza (aches and pains, fever, coughing) which in more severe cases progresses to shortness of breath. Vomiting, nasal congestion, loss of taste, and sore throat occur.

Symptoms usually appear a few days after exposure to the virus. Once infected a person may take days to weeks to fully recover.

While it seems most people under 20 years of age who become infected have mild or minimal symptoms (especially if immunised), severe illness can rarely occur, especially in the youngest children (infants under 6 months of age) and those with moderate-severe asthma or other respiratory problems.

Experience to date does not suggest increased risk of COVID-19 related harm for children with well-controlled diabetes compared with other healthy children. For example, in the recent Sydney delta outbreak, 150 of approximately 12,000 children under 15 years with documented infection required medical admission (1.3%). Of this 150, 52 (35%) had other significant medical conditions but only 1/52 (2%) had diabetes.

## What actions should I take?

Most importantly - it is highly recommended you get your COVID-19 vaccine. This includes the original 2-dose course (for all those 5 years of age and older), and more recently your booster dose for those 18 years and older. Boosters are currently not available to those <18 years, but as with all things COVID-related this situation may change in coming weeks or months. Please keep an eye on MOH information for this - <https://covid19.govt.nz/>.

Children 5-11 years receive a one third dose of vaccine. This has been shown in a clinical trial of over 1,500 children to give equivalent immune responses to 12- to 15-year-olds who received the full dose.

We recommend you closely follow the age based guidelines for dosing and boosters. **Do not delay doses based on age or other factors** i.e. if 11 years and 11 months, have the recommended 5-11 year dose, do not wait for the larger dose. In fact, for children in the “cross-over” age group of 10 to 14 years, evidence suggests that the one third dose is likely to give equivalent responses, especially if less than 40 kgs.

These vaccines are very safe, well studied, and have now been given to many millions of children and adults worldwide. Like all vaccines some side effects may occur, but seem to be less common than in older children and adults. In text-based surveys from about 87,000 parents of 5-11 year olds in Australia receiving the first dose of vaccine, about one quarter reported any problems. A local reaction was most common (23%) with fatigue (11%) next followed by headache (7%). Only 3% of parents reported any fever and only 2% needed time off school. Please see <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/> for more information.

Additional recommendations for minimising spread of all respiratory viruses include:

- 1) Obtain annual influenza vaccine for your child and the rest of your family from your GP as soon as it becomes available – influenza vaccine for children with diabetes is free of charge but there may be a charge for other family members. There hasn't been any flu in NZ for the past 2 years, but if overseas experience is any guide, flu and COVID-19 could circulate together this coming winter.
- 2) Staying at home when you are sick and avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- 3) Hand washing/Hygiene: washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and not touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- 3) Make sure you are prepared for sick days and potential isolation by ensuring you have adequate medical supplies and consumables available, including access to: blood ketone testing strips; your regular insulin therapy and technology consumables; supplies of your regular treatment for hypoglycaemia, good access to fluids in case you become unwell.

**If you become unwell – please do not stop taking your regular diabetes treatments.** You may need to adjust dosing depending on glucose levels and dietary intake.

Overall, people living with type 1 diabetes are at no higher risk of contracting coronavirus, but some, especially those who are older or with other underlying conditions, are at risk of more severe illness if infected.

Everyone in the community is encouraged to follow government advice closely to minimise risk for their household and minimise transmission across the population. Please follow this advice, including the use of social distancing measures.

## **What should I do if I have any symptoms?**

It is important if you have symptoms such as a new continuous cough and high temperature that you do not panic but follow Public Health guidelines to stay home in isolation

**If unwell, for COVID-19 health advice and information, contact the Healthline team (for free) on 0800 358 5453.**

Ensure you continue to monitor your child's blood glucose and implement your sick day rules, checking for ketones more closely. Contact your diabetes specialist team if you feel you need additional support for your diabetes.

Always contact Healthline team for advice before presenting in person to GP or Diabetes/Hospital Health services.

## **Additional information**

Latest health advice on COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) from the Ministry of Health

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

Type 1 diabetes and sickness: <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/managing-children-diabetes-when-they-get-sick>

Diabetes NZ link COVID information - <https://www.diabetes.org.nz/covid-19-protect-yourself>