

# Babies are spared severe COVID-19 symptoms

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Infants can become infected with the new coronavirus, but their bouts

with COVID-19 appear to be milder than those of older folks and people with chronic health problems, experts say.

Doctors in China tracked nine babies infected with coronavirus that they apparently picked up from a sick family member, and none of the infants fell deathly ill, according to a report published online recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

None of the sick babies required intensive care, had any severe complications or needed to be put on a respirator, the researchers said.

The new report is "proof of principle that shows infants can be infected," adding to earlier reports of infants contracting COVID-19, said Dr. David Kimberlin, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Infectious Diseases.

The study also jibes with other preliminary reports that "when the very youngest of children get infected, it appears to be a milder disease than at least what is being seen in the most severe cases in older adults," Kimberlin said.

Only 2.4% of reported cases in China have occurred in children, and only 0.2% of cases involve critical illness in kids, according to the World Health Organization. There have been no reports of any pediatric deaths related to COVID-19.

"Old people, their bodies have just taken more bruising over the years of living on this planet. Their lungs might be less flexible than a child's lungs. They just get more sick from various pulmonary illnesses," Kimberlin explained.

"My guess is that children are infected with this virus and they just handle it better because their bodies are more resilient," he continued.

"But I am guessing on that."

Of the nine infants in the report, only four suffered from a fever. Another two had a cough and either a runny nose or mucous.

Dr. Rahul Gupta, chief medical officer of the March of Dimes, said he's more concerned about the potential harm to newborns from a [pregnant woman](#) contracting the coronavirus.

Earlier coronavirus outbreaks of SARS ([severe acute respiratory syndrome](#)) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) were associated with preterm delivery and [low birth weight](#) newborns, and limited case reports show this might be a similar concern with COVID-19, Gupta said.

The good news is that a couple of studies out of China have reported that the [coronavirus](#) does not appear to be transmitted from pregnant mothers to newborns. These studies tracked 13 newborns in total, and did not find any evidence of babies born with COVID-19, according to a report published March 16 in the journal *Frontiers in Pediatrics*.

However, [infants](#) born prematurely or with low birth weight often face serious health problems immediately after delivery that can require intensive care, the March of Dimes says.

Preemies also are at higher risk for developing cognitive or behavioral problems later in life, while low birth weight babies are at increased risk of adult [chronic health problems](#) including diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and obesity, according to the March of Dimes.

Part of the concern is that COVID-19 appears to hit adults with chronic disease harder, Gupta said.

"We know more pregnant women today have more chronic medical diseases while they are pregnant," including high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity, he said. Women are also getting pregnant later in life.

Pregnant women should make sure their vaccinations are up to date, wash their hands frequently, stay away from people who are coughing, and protect their health in other common-sense ways, Gupta said.

If an expecting mom falls ill, "it's very important to contact immediately your provider over the phone and make them aware of your symptoms and help them manage your condition," he added.

Parents who want to protect their infant or child from COVID-19 can follow similar guidelines, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

They also can prevent spread of the virus by cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that are regularly touched in household common areas, and regularly laundering clothes, bedding and items like plush toys, the CDC says. If possible, use the warmest appropriate water setting and then dry the items completely.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [protecting yourself against coronavirus](#).

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