



Young people play vital role in stopping spread of COVID-19

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Editor's note: For the latest news on coronavirus disease 2019, visit <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/01/28/coronavirus>.

Children and young adults may not be as likely to get severely ill or die from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as older adults, but experts say they have an important role in stopping its spread and keeping those who are most vulnerable from getting sick.

"We all are in this together, and we all need to practice social distancing and that includes children, young adults and the rest of us," said Sean T. O'Leary, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, a member of the AAP Committee on Infectious Diseases, "The more we can slow the spread of this virus, the more lives we will save. It's clear if this virus spreads quickly, it will likely overwhelm our health care system in terms of availability of hospital beds and the availability of ventilators. So, it's crucially important to slow the spread of this virus, and that's everyone's responsibility."

A new study of U.S. COVID-19 cases published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* found the older people are, the higher the rate of hospitalization and death. Data show:

- Among people ages 85 and older, 31%-70% were hospitalized and 10%-27% died.
- Among ages 75-84, 30.5%-59% were hospitalized and 4%-10.5% died.
- Among ages 65-74, 29%-43.5% were hospitalized and 3%-5% died.
- Among age 55-64, 20.5%-30% were hospitalized and 1%-3% died.
- Among ages 45-54, 21%-28% were hospitalized and 0.5%-0.8% died.
- Among age 20-44, 14%-21% were hospitalized and 0.1%-0.2% died.
- Among ages 0-19, 2%-2.5% were hospitalized and none died.

The findings are in line with a recent [study in *Pediatrics*](#) in which children in China with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 were less likely than adults to have severe disease. However, infants had more severe illness than older children.

"It's not that children don't get infected ... and it's not that children don't get hospitalized," Dr. O'Leary said. "They are. It's just less severe than it is in the older adults."

He also said there are little data on children with special health care needs who have COVID-19.

"I think it is safest to be extremely careful with those kids just as we are being very careful with elderly," he said.

If infected, children and people in their 20s and 30s may spread the virus to others even if they are not displaying symptoms.

"There is now more and more evidence emerging about the role of asymptomatic people in the spread of this virus, so just because you're not feeling ill doesn't mean it's fine to go out to the bars, go out to the restaurants because you one, can pick it up, and two, may be inadvertently spread it to others," Dr. O'Leary said. "This is not to be taken lightly. This is like nothing anyone alive has ever seen, and we are all in this together."



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