



Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



COVID-19 & Children with Medical Complexity Information Guide

December 22, 2021

This guidance is intended for families with children with medical complexity and the teams who support them. It is based on known evidence as of November 25, 2021.

This document was created and reviewed by representatives from:

- BC Children's Hospital (complex care, biochemical diseases, respiratory, neurology, interventional radiology, infectious diseases)
- Sunny Hill Health Centre neuromotor services
- Canuck Place
- Community pediatricians



Ministry of Health



BC Centre for Disease Control

If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



Does your child have medical complexity? Children with medical complexity have the following:

- Chronic condition(s) that affect multiple parts of the body requiring ongoing management
- Dependence on technology for daily living (e.g., feeding tube)
- Increased need for health-care resources (e.g., multiple specialists)
- Families who need support for the care of children with medical complexity (e.g., At Home Program)

Where to find COVID-19 information:

The best source of up-to-date information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in British Columbia is the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) [website](#).

Emergency plans:

We recommend that you have a plan in case of emergencies. For example, what to do if the main caregiver for your child becomes ill. [MyBooklet BC](#) is a free online tool that families can use to create an information booklet for a loved one or themselves. It can be a good resource to have and update regularly as part of your plan.

Family support resources:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect everyone in various ways. This can be a difficult time especially for families with children with medical complexity. In addition to these medical guidelines, there are also other resources and supports at schools and/or in your community that may be helpful for your family. These include:

- [Family Support Institute of BC](#)
- [Rare Disease Foundation](#)
- [CanChild](#)
- A Child and Youth with Special Needs social worker, if your child is part of the [At Home Program](#)
- A family support worker, if your child is part of a [local centre for development](#)
- An affiliated social worker, if your child is part of a multi-disciplinary program at BC Children's Hospital (BCCH)
- [Anxiety Canada: Coping with COVID-19](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health](#)
- Faith groups
- Workers/supporters at the child's school
- Local neighbourhood houses or community centres

COVID-19 in Children with Medical Complexity

While severe COVID-19 illness in children is rare, it is more common in children with medical complexity.

Children with medical complexity and school

Should children with medical complexity attend school?

Every child has a right to an education during the pandemic. Whether your child attends school is a personal decision that can be made after discussing with their medical team(s). There are a number of benefits of sending your child to school including socialization, ability for parents to work and access to specialized school services and equipment.

It is important to keep in mind that children with medical complexity are also at higher risk of severe infections with other respiratory viruses like influenza (flu) and cold viruses, not only COVID-19. COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses are not completely comparable. However, if you sent your child to school in previous years during the influenza/flu season (typically from October to March) and there has not been a significant change in your child's health that would make them more at risk for infections, it may be reasonable for your child to continue attending school.

We advocate for all parties involved to collaborate in planning education and supports during the pandemic (e.g., therapy services). More information regarding COVID-19 in school settings is available [here](#).

COVID-19 testing for children with medical complexity

- **Who:** You can use the online, B.C. self-assessment tool (<https://bc.thrive.health/>) to determine if your child needs further assessment or testing for COVID-19. You can also call the HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 to receive advice on whether your child needs further assessment by a health-care provider.
- **How:** Children with medical complexity may not be able to do the mouth rinse and gargle method of testing due to the coordination required. Refer to BCCDC's [website](#) for more details.
- **Where:** It is best for children with medical complexity to get their testing done in the emergency department* as these children can get severely ill from any viral illness and testing centres do not have the capacity to assess and support them. Specialist pediatric assessment centres attached to the hospital ward may also have the capacity to do testing. Often a general pediatrician is available to support these centres if there are children who require testing.

*Please see the "Urgent visits to the emergency department" section below.

COVID-19, Influenza (flu) and other immunizations

COVID-19 and influenza (flu) immunization are recommended for children with medical complexity and their family members.

BCCDC recommends that children with medical complexity be up-to-date on their routine childhood immunizations unless they have been advised not to be immunized by a health professional.

For children with medical complexity who are at high risk of respiratory illnesses, pneumococcal polysaccharide (Pneu-P-23 vaccine) immunization is also recommended for children age two and then one booster five years later at age seven. This is free for those who meet the criteria. Please see visit HealthLink BC's [website](#) for more information.

BCCH Family Immunization Clinic is available for appointments for children and families when there are concerns regarding immunization and a child's condition. For more information, visit:

<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/clinics/family-immunization>

Children can also receive immunizations at their local [public health unit](#), primary care provider or pharmacy (pharmacists can immunize children ages five or older).

Medical appointments - How many people can accompany your child?

All community-based clinics are required to have a [communicable disease prevention plan](#) to keep everyone safe. Please check with the clinic and discuss beforehand if special arrangements are needed for your family.

At BCCH, clinic visits are limited to two adult caregivers for each patient.

- Up to date information on planning your visit is available [here](#).
- If you have a planned BCCH clinic visit and your child has any viral symptoms, please phone your child's care team before the visit and discuss with them. Routine appointments should be postponed while urgent appointments should still happen. Clinics can make arrangements to see children with viral infections safely with advance notice.

Urgent visits to the emergency department or local urgent and primary care centre

If you are concerned your child may have COVID-19 and they require:

- assessment in the emergency department/urgent and primary care centre and
- aerosol-generating medical procedures (nebulizer, continuous positive airway pressure, bilevel positive airway pressure),

It is advised that you call your health-care professional who can call your local emergency department/urgent and primary care centre to notify of your arrival ahead of time.

Unplanned/urgent gastrojejunostomy (GJ) tube changes:

For GJ malfunction that requires an unplanned change of the GJ tube:

- At BCCH:
 - Weekdays between 7:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m., families to call the interventional radiology booking clerk at 604-875-2329, ext. 3.
 - After-hours or on weekends, please go to the BCCH emergency department.
- For other locations: Arrange with your primary care provider or pediatrician for the best plan.

If you or your child has symptoms of COVID-19 or have been told by public health to self-isolate because of contact with a person with COVID-19, please inform the booking clerk when you speak to them. This will help them to take the necessary precautions to fix the GJ tube for your child while reducing the risk of transmission for everyone else.