



# Positive Parenting Malaysia

The Official Guide Series On Maternal, Child & Family Care By The Malaysian Paediatric Association

## COVID-19: Silver Linings



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Danger of **Coughs & Sneezes**


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# Moving Forward Vigilantly

There's no doubt COVID-19 is the most significant event of 2020. No countries were spared from the massive impact of this pandemic, including Malaysia. Our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers were dutifully working day and night. The police and armed forces braved the rain and heat. All these to ensure the infection can be contained and the people stay safe and healthy. Our frontliners deserve a major praise for their excellent job, resulting in a decrease in cases.

Life is returning to the "new normal". Children have finally returned to schools and kindergartens, while parents are back at offices, after months of sheltering at home. But strict procedures still have to be followed whenever we are outside. Masks, handwashing, physical distancing and

temperature checks are amongst the things that become our new habits.

But not all is bad in light of COVID-19. For our *Feature*, our experts talk about the positive side of things and the lessons we can take from this pandemic. Other topics in this issue for parents include the danger of coughs and sneezes, food safety while shopping at the market and substance abuse issues in teens.

As we move forward in this post-pandemic world, be assured that Positive Parenting will stay committed in supporting parents with latest parenting information. You can access our previous articles and issues on our website, and our Facebook and Instagram pages for more tips, infographics, videos and updates.

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# COVID-19: **Silver Linings**

*There's a gift in every experience, even difficult ones.*

By **ANN MARIE CHANDY**

The tragic COVID-19 pandemic has levelled a huge blow to humanity and halted various aspects of life as we know it. By September, the global death toll due to COVID-19 had reached over 850,000. In comparison, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), a total of only 8,098 people worldwide became sick during the SARS outbreak in 2003. It is shocking, that almost two decades after SARS, and especially with such huge strides made in technology and healthcare, that COVID-19 has been able to wreak such havoc globally, crippling even first world countries.

In Malaysia, the Movement Control Order began on 18 March, when schools, offices and businesses were shut down overnight. This was a public health strategy, which many other countries also adopted, in an effort to “flatten the curve” or slow down the spread of COVID-19 which was aggressively claiming victims. Only essential sectors were allowed to operate during this time, and the public was ordered to stay home.



their children, making the best of the MCO by doing family activities together and even praying together more often.

Dr Zulkifli said: “The knowledge that an unknown, miniscule enemy can infect and kill at any time, brought to the forefront the need to rally around in prayer, and this religiosity was the glue that bound many families together. These have all been positive changes that we’ve witnessed,” he says.

“When families were forced to spend time with each other, forced to interact with each other, they started talking to each other again.”

Almost two months later, on May 4, some of these rules were relaxed when the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) came into effect. Nonetheless, the fallout was, and remains, huge: businesses have gone bankrupt, employees have been retrenched, household incomes have depleted, extended families remain separated from their loved ones and children have had to resort to e-learning.



long run, will be good news for everyone. And less people in their cars on the streets has also resulted in cleaner environments.

**Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail, Chairman of Positive Parenting Programme,** notes that less vehicles on the roads has translated to less air pollution and with fewer factories discharging their waste, our rivers are now cleaner.

Communities also began banding together to fight the virus – you see tailors and homemakers sewing protective gear, DIY people and engineers building healthcare equipment, social welfare workers and activists quickly got into gear cooking and feeding the marginalised and needy, and everyone, everywhere began hailing and showing gratitude for the frontliners and the heroes of healthcare, who put their own safety at risk to care for total strangers.

Yet, even with so much bad news, even the experts agree that there has been a silver lining behind the gloomy cloud of the coronavirus – people have begun reacquainting themselves with the simple pleasures of life and celebrating little things that are so often overlooked – like the joys of cooking, baking and eating together at home, gardening and becoming more self-sufficient, as well as families having fun singing, playing games and exercising! Even the simple act of washing one’s hands and keeping good hygiene is being reinforced over and over, which in the

“COVID-19 has strangely been a good way to reset our lives! And now we have to live with the new norms,” Dr Zulkifli says, adding that the pandemic provided the opportunity for children to learn about infections and viruses. “Because of the MCO children have had to spend quality and quantity time with their parents, and this sort of role modelling from parents can have a lasting effect.”

Stuck at home for over two months, parents had to come up with innovative ways to entertain and spend time with



## Fresh eyes

**Consultant Developmental Paediatrician Dr Rajini Sarvananthan** agrees and observes that for many families, life at home has been enriched. "For me personally, the MCO meant that we were able to have great family time together and even marked my first Mother's Day in five years with all three of my children at home! With no helper coming in, my girls have also rallied around to help keep the house clean, and to cook meals."

Dr Rajini says that the MCO has forced many parents to rethink their roles as fathers and mothers.

"Children have been deprived of time with parents because of work commitments, traffic jams, enrichment classes, tutoring and sporting activities. Parents have had to outsource a lot of their parenting, nurturing and

caring duties to others," she explains. "But this enforced time at home allowed us all to reconnect with our children and form stronger bonds."

She explains that parents have been able to obtain new insights as to what their children's abilities and weaknesses are, and extra time in close contact allows them to nurture adaptive skills while doing chores together.

"Just by doing activities together at home, siblings are learning how to share, wait, take turns, negotiate, cooperate and share ideas. Even arguing can be healthy because, in reality, it is just a different form of negotiation!"

Dr Rajini is happy to share a couple of examples where healthy development has taken



place during this time. "Prior to the MCO, three toddlers between 18-24 months with poor social communication skills were seen in my clinic. All three were looked after by babysitters who had TVs on all the time, and one child had two iPads – one at home and one at her babysitter's. During the MCO, two of them reduced screen time and had more time to play, and we saw improvements in just six weeks! So, we are continuing to monitor their progress," Dr Rajini shared. "Another mother emailed me to say she had managed to toilet train her five-year-old daughter who has special needs – this came after 18 months of trying!"

## Family bonding

Spending time at home has also allowed spouses to refresh their perspective of what the other half has to deal with at home or at work.

In an interview with Positive Parenting, young father Abdul Hadi Kassim, from Cyberjaya, shared that working alongside his family has been such a memorable experience. The 31-year-old project executive said: "It has been challenging, no doubt. But I have an understanding spouse, and everything has worked out quite smoothly. As a husband, I also now have a new appreciation

for how hard and challenging it must be for my wife who is a full-time housewife, to manage the whole family's needs every day. All housewives out there deserve a big applause for what they do daily. It is truly noble work."

**Behavioural psychologist Mr Alexius Cheang** says that seeing one's spouse take care of the household, along with the children would definitely have been an eye-opener for most working adults who often don't realise the level of work needed to run a household.

It's also no secret now that many parents have had to juggle conducting boardroom meetings with laundry and cooking duties, and then move on to helping kids with their schoolwork, and even doing extra tasks like giving haircuts during lockdown. Lots of funny memes and Internet stories have highlighted this situation, which could have been traumatic if spouses were not supportive. Cheang emphasised how wonderful it has been to see parents assisting one another in the shared responsibilities and having conversations about

## Stirring up the love

Another positive change that has been taking place in the last couple months is that more people have begun cooking and eating at home, as well as gardening.

**Nutritionist and President of Nutrition Society of Malaysia Dr Tee E Siong** is so pleased to see this.

“Especially at a time like this, it is important to continue consuming adequate amounts of fruits and veggies, because they contain phytonutrients, vitamins and minerals that can act as antioxidants to boost up your immune system. You want to be able to fight the virus,” Dr Tee says, emphasising the importance of having a good diet. “It’s the best time to change food habits and adopt healthier patterns. I do hope families will continue to practise



cooking and eating at home because healthy eating should not just be limited to fighting COVID-19.”

If you’ve been following social media, you would have seen how mums and dads and kids have been sharing recipes and photos of homemade food; it seems like overnight many have turned masterchefs, even baking like sourdough bread from scratch! Dr Tee is encouraged by this and hopes that families will adopt healthier cooking and eating practices for the long run. When you cook

at home, you are in control of all the ingredients that go into your dishes.

“And if you keep practising, you will soon develop culinary skills that your family members will be proud of! When things return to normal (and they will!), make cooking healthy meals at home a way of life. This is an investment that will enable you and your family members to fight other chronic diseases caused by unhealthy eating, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancers.”



expectations from each other. Everyone in the household has had to adjust to the new normal, and the best partnerships are created when there is open communication as well as respect for what each other brings to the relationship.

By having both parents at home also, families have started enjoying the numerous opportunities to interact together – singing, dancing, exercising and making Tik Tok videos together. Cheang wholeheartedly believes that the family that plays together stays together.

“This statement is supported by research which states that the more frequently family members do fun activities together, the more family satisfaction and closeness they have. In addition, any activity that facilitates family relationships

such as playing board games can increase attention, listening and concentration skills with one another,” he said. “The MCO was a perfect opportunity for bonding to occur between parents and children. Parents were able to learn what activities keep their children focused, as well as what motivates them. Children, in turn, have been able to see what their parents do in their jobs. Outside of work and education-based activities, there has also been a tremendous opportunity to interact and really get to know each other better.”

### Make gratitude a way of life

So, while the going has been rough, remember that there have been some lovely things that have kept us going. Indeed, a crisis can often bring out the best in people, and the 2020 pandemic has reminded us why it is important to celebrate every day and take care of ourselves, our communities, and our environment.

Let's be grateful for our families, for the healthcare system in our country, for our teachers who have just kept teaching like energizer



batteries throughout this whole ordeal, for the cleaner air and sunshine that we enjoy every day, for good food and friendly neighbours ... the list goes on, if only you take time to look for the positives.

Things may never go back to how they used to be before the

pandemic, but let's continue to appreciate what we have, remember the lessons we have learnt along the way, and march on with a renewed sense of what keeps Malaysians healthy and happy.

### Practise gratitude

One of the most powerful tools for staying healthy is practising gratitude. Being grateful is not only important for making you feel better psychologically during a crisis, it can also improve your physical wellbeing. Here's how you can get started:

1. Reflect on the good that has happened in your life, no matter how small or insignificant – make a list!
2. Enjoy that you had that positive experience, no matter what negatives may exist in your life.
3. Do this frequently and continually so you form a habit, and soon you will learn to recognise good things in your life despite the bad things that might be happening. **PP**







# YOU CAN PROTECT YOUR BABY AGAINST WHOOPING COUGH

# NOW

## WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial disease which can be very serious, especially for young children.<sup>1</sup> It is a respiratory infection characterized by repeated coughing fits, difficulty breathing and the associated 'whoop' noise when gasping for breath.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW CAN MY BABY CATCH WHOOPING COUGH?

Whooping cough is spread through the air by infectious droplets so it is easily transmitted by other people coughing or sneezing or being close to a person with the disease.<sup>1,2</sup>

## WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO SPREAD WHOOPING COUGH TO MY BABY?

Many newborns get whooping cough from older brothers or sisters, parents (especially mothers), other family members, or caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO MY BABY?

Whooping cough can cause serious and sometimes deadly complications in babies and young infants.<sup>3</sup>

The coughing fits can last for several weeks or months.<sup>1</sup> Infants and young children can be distressed and may turn blue due to difficulty breathing.<sup>4</sup> In very young babies the cough may not be particularly noticeable, but there may be brief periods when they stop breathing.<sup>4</sup> About half the babies under a year old who catch whooping cough may need to be cared for in hospital.<sup>3</sup>

## WHY IS MY NEWBORN BABY VULNERABLE?

Newborns and young infants under 2 months of age are at highest risk of serious complications.<sup>5</sup> Newborn babies have no natural protection against whooping cough at birth or in the first few months of life, leaving them unprotected and highly vulnerable.<sup>5,6</sup>

## ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREVENTION OPTIONS

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# 5 Reasons to Play Outdoors

By **Dr Roseline Yap**, Nutritionist & Hon Treasurer, Nutrition Society of Malaysia

*The latest statistics from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) of Malaysia 2019 show 1 in 2 adults and 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese. Other than nutrition, lack of physical activity is probably one of the factors that led to these statistics, with 1 in 4 adults and 2 in 5 school-going children leading sedentary lifestyles.*

It is no secret that regular physical activity is good for all in the family. But spending time outdoors is just as beneficial. Various studies have shown that outdoor play can benefit both mental health too, besides physical health!

So, here are five reasons why parents should not just watch their kids play but are encouraged to play outdoors together as a family.

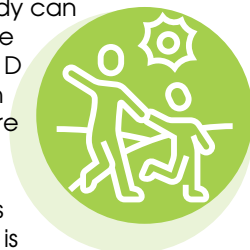
## 1. Increased physical activity.

Running around a park can be fun for kids, and you might find cycling or walking with them much more enjoyable than exercising at the gym. It's not as intensive but still counts toward one's daily physical activity goal.



## 2. Source of Vitamin D.

Our body can produce vitamin D through exposure to sunlight and this vitamin is crucial to help the body to absorb calcium, which is important for bone health. A study in 2012 showed almost half of Malaysian children have vitamin D deficiency. In addition, studies also showed that adults with vitamin D deficiency have been linked to increased risk of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease and obesity. Hence, playing outdoors more often can help to provide vitamin D especially for growing children.



### 3. Nature for immunity.

Increased exposure to a natural outdoors environment benefits a child's mental health and general wellbeing, which can positively influence his immune system. You can also help enhance his immunity by including probiotic-rich foods in his diet, as these good bacteria keep his digestive system (also the body's first line of defence against infections) in top form. Even for adults, spending time outdoors can help to improve immune function for general health and prevention of chronic diseases.

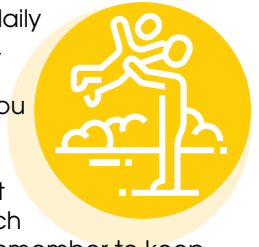


### 4. Promotes mental acuity.

Being outdoors in the nature can promote curiosity as your child is exposed to various living organisms in the environment such as plants, flowers, insects and animals. Playing outdoors with others helps to boost creativity and problem solving skills too. It provides younger kids with unique sensory experiences that indoor spaces lack.



hectic daily routines, and allows you to have fun and connect with each other. Remember to keep digital devices aside!



Outdoor activities present the family with more opportunities to actively play and try out new things. It may be tough to come up with something that everyone enjoys, but once you do, the potential for fun and bonding are huge.

### 5. Promotes stronger family bonds.

Regular family time outdoors gives everyone a break from



## Take extra precautions!

The recent COVID-19 pandemic means you may need extra precautions when venturing outdoors:



Wear face masks around other people.

Avoid large crowds and maintain physical distancing.



Use hand sanitisers when necessary.

Bring disinfecting wipes with you in case you need them.



Getting started!



Start with simple activities, such as going to the nearby parks and playgrounds. Mix in other activities by bringing balls, hula hoops and skipping rope to keep things interesting. Be bold – explore new places and try new activities!

City folks can opt to go for hikes/walks at nearby local trails, parks, waterfalls, or nature preserves and enjoy the day with your family there. Cycling together around your neighbourhood can also be fun, or try an off-road bicycle trail, if you're feeling adventurous. You can also play some sports such as football, badminton and basketball together as a family in the outdoors.

Just like any other family activity, make basic preparations – pack healthy snacks and lots of drinking water, have a basic first aid kit and bug/mosquito repellent. It is recommended to also check the weather forecast and if the air quality is bad, just reschedule your outing. Make an effort to do such activities regularly and keep the momentum going. Soon, these activities will become family tradition! **PP**

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\* Reference: Mokhtar N, et al. (2018). Modulation of intestinal dysbiosis in patients with constipation-predominant irritable bowel syndrome using lactobacillus-containing cultured milk drink. Gut 2018;67:A70. [https://gut.bmj.com/content/67/Suppl\\_2/A70.2](https://gut.bmj.com/content/67/Suppl_2/A70.2)

# An Unwelcome Surprise

*Compared with children, adults have a stronger immune system. However, do you know that adults may carry viruses without being aware of it? You look healthy and well on the outside, but you might be bringing home an illness and putting your family at risk.*



By **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist

Such a person is known as a **carrier**, i.e. **someone whose body houses a disease and is able to transmit the disease to others**. The method of transmission is dependent on the type of disease – whether it is airborne, or if it spreads through water or direct contact.

Are carriers at risk of the disease? The answer is almost always yes. It's usually a matter of time before his immunity is overwhelmed, especially if his immunity dips for any reason, e.g. due to stress or lack of sleep.

**An asymptomatic carrier is a person who has the disease but does not show any symptoms.** This normally means that the person may

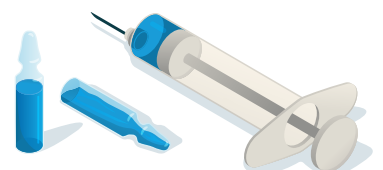
unknowingly spread the disease while remaining undetected. As expected, this can have severe repercussions, especially as it is unlikely that the carrier exercises any special restraints to prevent the transmission of the disease. This is what we went through with COVID-19, and why the government placed a Movement Control Order in a bid to prevent the virus from spreading quickly.

Other than COVID-19, there are other infections which can be carried and spread unknowingly, especially those that are airborne or spread through water droplets. These include influenza viruses and pneumococcal bacteria, which we can prevent. Disease-causing microorganisms can

lurk in the throats of carriers and spread with every breath, exhalation, cough/sneeze, or even when talking with others.

## Vaccination saves lives

Vaccines for active influenza strains are available on an annual basis. The pneumococcal vaccine is scheduled to be included in the National Immunisation Programme (NIP), as this disease has a high fatality rate and can cause numerous complications.



Pneumococcal disease is caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The 'hidden danger' of this disease lurks not just in the complications that it can cause, but also in how one can easily be an asymptomatic carrier and unwittingly infect loved ones.

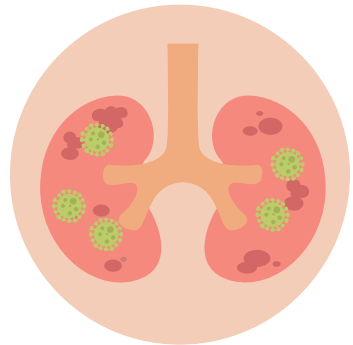
The bacteria is transmitted via little droplets from the nose or mouth. However, lab tests suggest the bacteria can survive for long periods of time on surfaces. This means that other than droplet transmission, there is also the possibility of infection from contaminated surfaces.

## Pneumo danger!

What makes pneumococcus something to be taken seriously?



**Easy person-to-person transmission.**



**Causes many life-threatening complications,**  
e.g. pneumonia,  
septicaemia, meningitis,  
middle ear infection, sinusitis,  
bronchitis.

## Everyone deserves protection

While it's important to vaccinate the ones most at risk, other members of the family should also consider getting vaccinated. You never know if you will come in contact with someone else who is a carrier, so it only makes sense for you to take the necessary steps to prevent this.

To achieve this, the best option available is still vaccination, as this will help build your body's immunity to the disease, even if you have had it in the past.

## Keep your child safe

Prevention is the best cure – check with your child's paediatrician on what vaccination options are available. Vaccinating your child can prevent the disease but at the same time, vaccination does not guarantee perfect protection. There is a small possibility of still getting pneumococcal disease, however the symptoms would be much less severe than for someone who has not been vaccinated. **PP**

## Who are at risk?



**Infants & young children**



**The elderly**



**People with compromised immune systems**

An educational contribution by



Malaysian Paediatric Association



# PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE CAN BE DEADLY<sup>1</sup>

## PENYAKIT PNEUMOKOKAL BOLEH MEMBAWA MAUT<sup>1</sup>

Don't Wait. Vaccinate Early to Protect Your Little One  
 Jangan Tunggu. Beri Vaksin Awal untuk Melindungi Anak Kecil Anda

The 5 Most Common Strains In Malaysia<sup>2</sup>

5 Jenis Strain Paling Umum Di Malaysia<sup>2</sup>

14

19A

19F

6B

6A

YOUNG CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF GETTING PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASES. THOSE WITH INCREASED RISK INCLUDE<sup>3</sup>:

ANAK KECIL MEMPUYAI RISIKO MENDAPAT PENYAKIT PNEUMOKOKAL. MEREKA YANG MEMPUYAI RISIKO TINGGI TERMASUKLAH<sup>3</sup>:

HOW DOES IT SPREAD<sup>3,4</sup>:

BAGAIMANA IA MEREBAK<sup>3,4</sup>:



< 2 years of age  
 Di bawah umur 2 tahun



Attend nursery / day care centre  
 Menghadiri pusat penjagaan kanak-kanak / pusat bimbingan kanak-kanak



Weakened immune system due to illnesses and treatment  
 Sistem imun yang lemah akibat penyakit dan rawatan



From a cough or a sneeze  
 Dari batuk atau bersin



Contact with contaminated items  
 Bersentuhan dengan barangan yang tercemar



Close proximity with carriers  
 Berada berdekatan dengan pembawa

PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE CAN CAUSE SERIOUS HARM TO YOUR CHILD<sup>1</sup>  
 PENYAKIT PNEUMOKOKAL BOLEH MENYEBABKAN KEMUDARATAN KEPADA ANAK ANDA<sup>1</sup>



Pneumonia - Inflammation of the lungs<sup>1</sup>  
 Pneumonia - Keradangan paru-paru<sup>1</sup>

Severe implications: Death, Lung Damage  
 Implikasi yang teruk: Kematian, Kerosakan Paru-paru



Meningitis - Inflammation of the brain<sup>1</sup>  
 Meningitis - Keradangan otak<sup>1</sup>

Severe implications: Death, Brain Damage, Hearing Loss  
 Implikasi yang teruk: Kematian, Kerosakan Otak, Hilang Pendengaran



Bacteraemia - Blood infection<sup>1</sup>  
 Bakteremia - Jangkitan darah<sup>1</sup>

Severe implications: Death, Permanent Organ Damage  
 Implikasi yang teruk: Kematian, Kerosakan Organ Kekal



Acute Otitis Media - Middle ear infection<sup>1</sup>  
 Acute Otitis Media - Jangkitan pada telinga tengah<sup>1</sup>

Severe implications: Permanent or Partial Hearing Loss  
 Implikasi yang teruk: Hilang Pendengaran Separa atau Kekal

PNEUMOCOCCAL CONJUGATE VACCINES (PCV) CAN BE GIVEN AS EARLY AS SIX WEEKS<sup>5</sup>. CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR FOR MORE INFORMATION.

VAKSIN KONJUGAT PNEUMOKOKAL (PCV) BOLEH DIBERIKAN SEAWAL UMUR ENAM MINGGU<sup>5</sup>. BERUNDING DENGAN DOKTOR ANDA UNTUK MAKLUMAT LANJUT.

1. Pneumococcal Disease | Symptoms and Complications | CDC. Retrieved on July 18, 2019 from <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumococcal/about/symptoms-complications.html>  
 2. Arushothy, R et al. (2019). Pneumococcal serotype distribution and antibiotic susceptibility in Malaysia: A four-year study (2014-2017) on invasive paediatric isolates.  
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# The Danger of Coughs & Sneezes

By **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist



*During the COVID-19 pandemic, we were told how the disease spreads by respiratory droplet transmission, particularly by coughing and sneezing. Many other diseases, such as flu, also spread this way. How can we mitigate this type of transmission?*

Pathogens such as viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites are responsible for many infectious diseases. One way to categorise infectious diseases is by how they spread. These diseases can transmit directly or indirectly from the reservoir of the pathogen (which can be an organism or the environment) to humans.

## Common transmission routes

- Respiratory droplet
- Airborne
- Faecal-oral
- Sexual
- Vector-borne
- Blood
- Contaminated surface
- Contaminated food and water
- Animal-to-person
- Mother-to-child



## Respiratory droplet transmission

Viruses such as influenza virus, rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and coronavirus spread via respiratory droplet transmission. A respiratory droplet is a particle consisting mostly of water, as well as various cells, physiological electrolytes and possibly infectious agents. It has a diameter greater than 5 micrometre ( $\mu\text{m}$ ;  $1000\mu\text{m} = 1\text{mm}$ ) (for reference, the diameter of a strand of Asian hair is  $80\text{-}120\mu\text{m}$ ). These droplets tend to rapidly fall to the ground due to gravity, hence limiting spread to within a short distance.

The droplets are produced naturally when we sneeze, cough, talk, sing or breathe. They may also form artificially during medical procedures such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), intubation, bronchoscopy and surgery. Transmission occurs when the droplets reach vulnerable mucosal surfaces (eyes, nose or mouth).

Sneezes and coughs are the main routes of transmission. A sneeze can produce up to 40,000 droplets, while coughing can produce up to 3000 droplets. This is about the same as talking for five minutes!

## Droplet vs airborne transmission

	Droplet	Airborne
<b>Size (diameter)</b>	> 5 µm	≤ 5 µm
<b>Distance of spread</b>	1-2 m; may also spread indirectly via hands and contaminated surfaces.	> 2 m; does not require close contact.
<b>Where it settles in respiratory tract</b>	More likely to settle in the upper respiratory tract (nose and throat).	Have potential to be inhaled into the lower respiratory tract (bronchi and alveoli).
<b>Preventive measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper PPE (personal protective equipment) usage, including surgical face mask.</li> <li>• Appropriate patient placement in a single room or with other patients (with similar infection).</li> <li>• Limit patient movement and ensure mask is worn outside the room.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper PPE usage, including N95 respirator.</li> <li>• Isolation of patient in a single, airborne isolation infection room.</li> <li>• Limit patient movement and ensure mask is worn outside the room.</li> </ul>

### Factors of spread & survivability

The content of droplets depends on their origin in the respiratory tract. The formation and distribution of the droplets are determined by factors such as the velocity of exhaled air, viscosity, content and quantity of fluid, and flow path (i.e. through the nose, mouth or both). The direction and strength of airflows, temperature, humidity and other environmental factors also play important roles.

Indirect transmission may occur via contact with contaminated objects or surfaces. Viruses generally survive longer on hard surfaces than porous surfaces. Moreover, viruses protected by a lipid layer (e.g. influenza virus, RSV and coronavirus), are more stable under dry conditions, whereas viruses without protective layer (e.g. rhinovirus, enterovirus and adenovirus) are more stable under humid conditions. Viruses are also more stable at low air temperatures.

### Preventing droplet transmission



- **Cough/sneeze etiquette.** Cover your mouth with a tissue or your elbow when coughing or sneezing, dispose of the tissue properly, and wash your hands immediately. Stay home if possible, but wear a face mask if you need to go out.
- **Social (or physical) distancing.** This depends on the scale of the outbreak. If it is an epidemic, you may need to avoid crowded

places, keep 1-2 m away from others in public spaces and avoid physical greetings (e.g. handshaking or hugs). Staying at home is the simplest way!

- **Practise hygiene.** Wash your hands with soap frequently and thoroughly, especially before and after preparing or eating food, and after using the toilet. Hand sanitisers can also be used. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Sanitise commonly used objects/surfaces.
- **Vaccination.** Some infectious diseases can be prevented with vaccination. For example, it is recommended to take flu vaccines annually as there are different flu viruses circulating for every flu season and immunisation declines over time. The development of COVID-19 vaccine is still on-going.

The COVID-19 health crisis has been a very solemn experience for all of us. Hundreds of thousands of deaths have been recorded and millions have been infected worldwide. As we move forward, we need to continue practising the new norms, like frequent handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette, to prevent future outbreaks as well as the spread of other illnesses.

An educational contribution by



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IN MALAYSIA, AMONG CHILDREN WHO WERE HOSPITALISED FOR FLU, 88% OF THEM WERE BELOW 5 YEARS OLD.<sup>1</sup> UNFORTUNATELY, SOME DO NOT SURVIVE. SO NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE FLU TO CHILDREN ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF COVID-19. PROTECT THEM FROM FLU WITH YEARLY VACCINATION.

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*Babies and children under five years old are vulnerable to infectious diseases as their immune system is not fully developed yet. It is best to give your child's immune system a little help with protection against certain diseases when he is ready to explore the world out there.*



# Protecting the Vulnerable Young Ones

By **Datuk Dr Zulkifli Ismail**, Consultant Paediatrician & Paediatric Cardiologist

Babies receive antibodies from mum (passed through the placenta, and later on via breastmilk). However, newborns and infants face a higher risk of infection because these antibodies do not provide them with full protection, and maternal antibodies only last about nine months.

As your baby grows and matures, his immune system will gradually become stronger, but it's important that it receives extra protection, in the form of vaccinations, against potentially deadly diseases that can

overwhelm an unprepared immune system.

## Vaccine-preventable diseases

A child falling ill is not an unusual occurrence as most children get sick several times a year, with ailments such as the common cold, ear infections, etc. Worse still, part of an infant's development includes putting things into their mouths which increases the risk of

infection. They are at the mercy of any germ in the environment, carriers (people with a disease who show no symptoms, also referred to as asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals), and contaminated objects/toys/surfaces, etc.

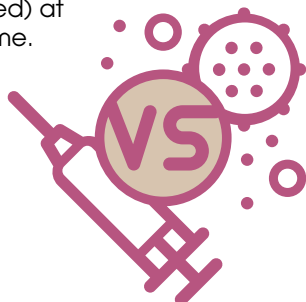


Here are some vaccine-preventable childhood infections with potentially serious consequences:

Vaccine-preventable diseases	What we need to know
<b>Diphtheria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The bacteria produces a toxin that enters the blood and can damage the heart, kidneys, and nervous system. If the airways are badly affected, the child's breathing may be cut off, resulting in death.</li> </ul>
<b>Tetanus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can cause severe muscle spasms resulting in broken bones. May also affect vocal cords, cause breathing difficulties and abnormal heart rhythms, especially worse in younger children.</li> </ul>

Vaccine-preventable diseases	What we need to know
<b>Pertussis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babies (&lt;6 months) may not cough but have difficulty breathing, leading to breath-holding and turning blue.</li> <li>Not every child will develop the 'whooping' sound – see a doctor for any prolonged coughs/colds.</li> </ul>
<b>Hepatitis B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infections that last &gt;6 months can lead to chronic liver problems, including liver failure. It may also potentially cause liver cancer.</li> </ul>
<b>Polio</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-paralytic polio may cause pain and/or muscle stiffness along the neck and spinal area. Paralytic polio can paralyse certain muscle groups, e.g. muscles used for breathing or leg muscles.</li> <li>Post-polio syndrome occurs years after recovery. The previously affected muscles will gradually weaken and waste away.</li> </ul>
<b>Hib</b> ( <i>Haemophilus influenzae Type B</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A possible complication is meningitis, which may cause brain damage.</li> </ul>
<b>Measles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A common complication is ear infections that may cause permanent hearing loss.</li> <li>A common long term sequelae is subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE). It progresses slowly but damages and scars the brain.</li> </ul>
<b>Mumps</b>	<p>Complications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inflammation of the testicles (orchitis) or ovaries (oophoritis).</li> <li>Orchitis can be painful and may lead to a decrease in testicular size but seldom causes sterility.</li> <li>Encephalitis and meningitis (membrane inflammation surrounding the brain and spinal cord).</li> </ul>
<b>Rubella</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seldom causes severe problems in children.</li> <li>Pregnant women who are infected early during pregnancy face a 1 in 5 chance of problems, e.g. miscarriages and serious birth defects.</li> </ul>

Many of these diseases are less common nowadays as they have long been included in our National Immunisation Programme (NIP). However, these diseases have remained a problem. Unfortunately, there are some parents who refuse to vaccinate their child and this has led to small outbreaks occurring from time to time. Relying solely on herd immunity is not a good idea as your child can be exposed to the disease (via a carrier or someone who is infected) at any time.



## Vaccination is the best option

To prevent both the disease and its complications, protection from exposure is important. Speak to your child's paediatrician to learn more about why vaccinations should not be skipped or to find out how you can vaccinate your child against these common childhood infectious diseases.

## Fake news!

The claim that SSPE is caused by the measles vaccine is false. Studies show that the measles vaccine prevents measles thus also prevents SSPE.

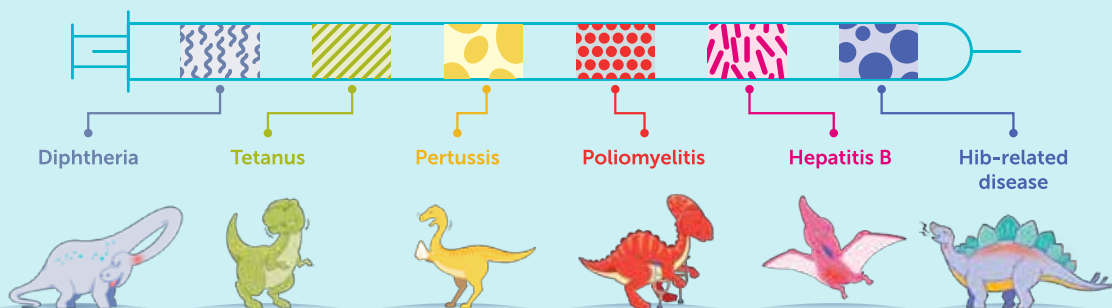
Remember that vaccination saves lives. While it will not guarantee complete immunity from the disease, your child need not suffer as much if he gets infected. There is a big difference compared to an unvaccinated child who will be in great pain and may possibly face death. The very least that we can do is to protect our child and prevent potential diseases from occurring, and to minimise the risk of infection as much as possible. **PP**

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Talk to your doctor on how to prevent infection from these diseases



References:

1, Sanofi, Sanofi Pasteur Vaccines, Available at <https://www.sanofi.com/en/your-health/vaccines>, Accessed on 20 January 2020, 2, Sanofi, Creating vaccines, protecting life, Available at <https://www.sanofi.com.my/en/healthcaresolutions/vaccines>, Accessed on 20 January 2020.

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*We all know that good hygiene is crucial for preventing most diseases. However, in the case of rotavirus infections, good hygiene alone may not be sufficient or effective enough.*

# Break Free from the Chains #Rotavirusfree

By **Dr Husna Musa**, Paediatrician, **Dato' Dr Musa Mohd Nordin**, Consultant Paediatrician and Neonatologist

Rotavirus contamination can happen easily – just one person within your social circle who has rotavirus can spread the disease to others. A study in a day care setting found live rotavirus samples on the third day on several frequently-touched surfaces near the diapering area (i.e. sink, diaper pail lid, and fridge handle) and also on the caregiver's hands. The home environment faces the same problem. The rotavirus is robust and resistant against some of the cleaning agents.

## Clean, but not clean enough

Contamination can happen as normal handwashing with soap and water is less effective

against rotavirus, as compared to alcohol-based hand sanitisers. Unfortunately, this is not a normal handwashing routine and so it is possible to contaminate objects/surfaces by touch, e.g. light switches, door knobs, TV remote, handphones, keys, cups, plates, cutlery... well, you get the idea.

This makes it easy for the rotavirus to spread to other people. Worse, the rotavirus is hardy enough to survive on dry surfaces for up to two months! Infants and toddlers tend to be more susceptible because they have a habit of placing their hands/fingers and other objects into their mouth. As their immune systems are still immature, they will be more

seriously affected by rotavirus infections.

The World Health Organization estimates that rotavirus is responsible for the deaths of over 215,000 children under 5 years of age globally in 2013. Rotavirus outbreaks have also occurred in Malaysia, with the most recent in Sabah last year.

## A not-so-obvious sign

The common signs and symptoms for rotavirus include severe diarrhoea, vomiting, fever and abdominal pain. As these symptoms are shared by many other illnesses, parents may not suspect rotavirus at all.

## Dehydration can be deadly

Severe diarrhoea and/or vomiting in infants and young children can easily cause dehydration. They may need to be hospitalised and/or placed on an intravenous drip to keep them hydrated. Severe dehydration can be life-threatening so don't delay in seeking medical attention.



The delay in diagnosing rotavirus allows more time for greater home contamination, as additional precautions are unlikely to be taken beforehand. Siblings at home face the risk of infection from contaminated objects/surfaces. Visitors also risk picking up the virus and taking it home, thus unwittingly infecting their children.

## A typical scenario of how contamination happens

- Your infant has diarrhoea and soils his diapers. It may leak, contaminating clothing, bedding, and/or toys.
- Handling diapers or soiled things means getting the virus on your hands. Not disinfecting your hands leads to further contamination by touch, e.g. laundry basket, washing machine, etc.
- Soiled clothing, bedding, or toys that are improperly disinfected are sources of further contamination and/or subsequent reinfection.
- This leads to frequent bouts of "unexplained" diarrhoea, which perpetuate the cycle.

## How do you stop the contamination?



**Hands:** In addition to washing with soap and water, use alcohol-based hand sanitiser immediately after handling any diarrhoeal matters (diapers, soiled clothes, etc.)



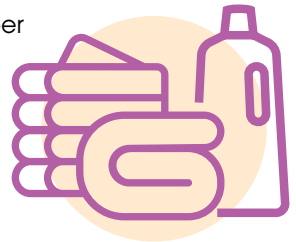
**Soiled items:** Wash them separately and always handle them carefully. Add chlorine bleach solution to your wash and wear rubber gloves if washing by hand. Wash/disinfect the gloves after use.

### Potentially contaminated surfaces:

Use chlorine-based disinfectants (e.g. chlorine bleach) to wash surfaces. Mix according to the manufacturer's instructions and take your time when wiping (to give it time to kill germs or viruses). Allow for ventilation during/after wiping to prevent breathing excess fumes.



**Protect your bed:** Use bedliners to prevent diaper leaks soaking the bed. Wash soiled bedliners separately with chlorine bleach solution. Badly contaminated bedliners should be disposed of with care to prevent contaminating other items.



*Note: Chlorine bleach is unsuitable for certain materials (e.g. wool, silk, etc) and can permanently damage dyed fabrics.*

Learning how to prevent the spread of rotavirus is important, but just like any disease, prevention is the best cure. You can get your child vaccinated against rotavirus from as young as 2 months, so check with your paediatrician if you have not vaccinated him yet. **PP**

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# New parents or a baby on the way?

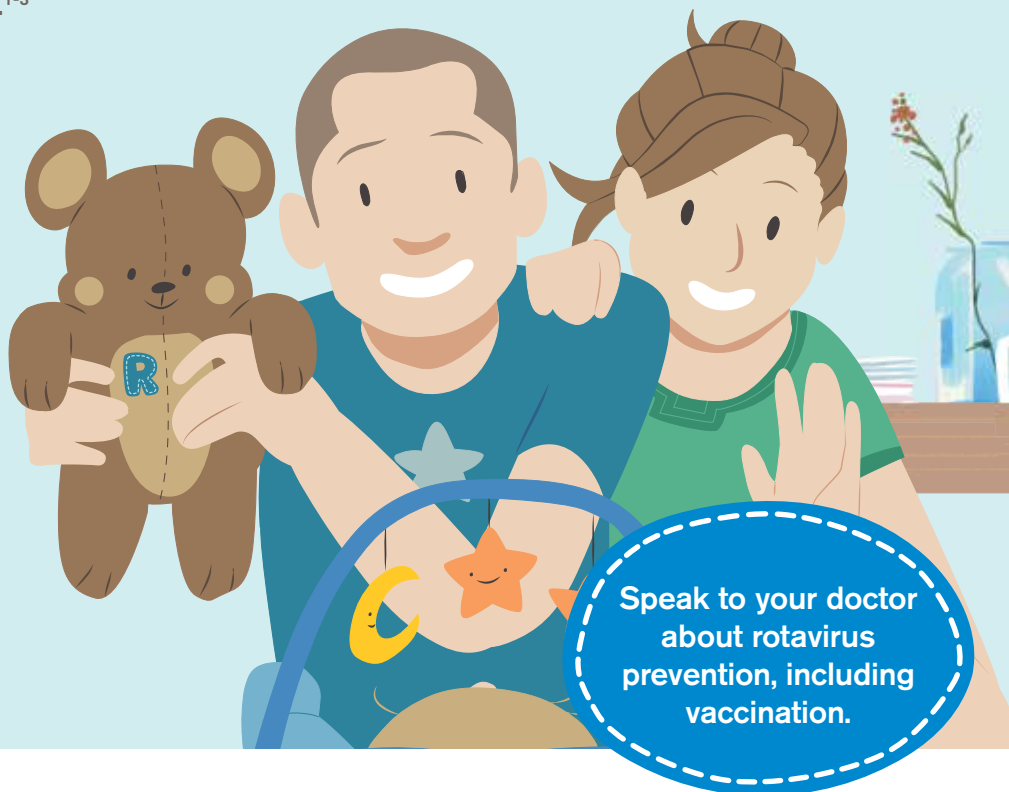
Speak to a healthcare provider about **prevention of rotavirus diarrhoea.**

Rotavirus diarrhoea is very common and has potentially serious outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

By the age of 5 **nearly every child** is likely to have encountered rotavirus.<sup>1</sup>

Babies are most susceptible to rotavirus disease which may cause **severe diarrhoea and vomiting**, putting them at risk of **dehydration** and **hospitalisation**.<sup>1</sup>

While hygiene and breastfeeding are important, they are not enough to prevent rotavirus diarrhoea. **Vaccination against rotavirus diarrhoea is the most effective way to help protect your baby.**<sup>1-3</sup>



**References:** 1. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. ECDC Expert opinion on rotavirus vaccination in infancy. Stockholm: ECDC; 2017. 2. Tate JE, *et al.* Lancet Infect Dis. 2012; 12(2): 136–41. 3. Rotavirus gastroenteritis. World Health Organization. Accessed June 2019. Available at: <http://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/rotavirus-gastroenteritis/disease-and-epidemiology.html>

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*Aside from genetics, factors influencing growth include nutrition and a physically active lifestyle. Proper nutrition plays an important role in fuelling a child's physical growth and supporting mental development.*



# The Healthy Way to Optimise Your Child's Catch-up Growth

By **Dr Tan Sue Yee**, Nutritionist and Member of Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Children grow rapidly in infancy and early childhood. To support proper growth and development, they must have adequate energy and nutrients. This is a concern for most mums, especially if their child has poor dietary variety and/or poor eating habits, e.g. picky eating, as the risk of underweight and poor growth increases.

Left unrectified, under-nutrition and/or stunting can **directly affect a child's cognitive and motor development**. This hinders the child's learning process as he has less energy and interest in learning, resulting in poorer

academic performance. It is also associated with behavioural abnormalities, and may impede proper immune function development.

## Monitor your child's growth

Parents should not skip regular check-up sessions with their child's paediatrician. Make it a point to monitor your child's growth regularly (e.g. once a week) in between scheduled appointments.

Measure and record your child's weight and height-for-age using a bathroom scale



and a measuring tape or wall height chart. If his weight/height does not maintain an appropriate growth pattern and/or he has little to no weight gain over a period

of 2-3 months, this indicates a potential problem such as poor growth. A more in-depth evaluation with a qualified healthcare professional is needed.



## Proper nutrition is key

Promote your child's healthy growth and prevent poor growth and/or stunting by inculcating healthy, balanced eating habits from young. This will ensure he receives complete nutrition for growth and becomes accustomed to healthy nutritional choices.

Here are some basic nutrient requirements and why they're important:

### Calories

Carbohydrate and fats should be his main source of energy for proper growth and development. Offer healthy food choices that are energy- and nutrient-dense from all food groups at every meal such as sweet potatoes, corn, fruits, milk, eggs, etc. Avoid empty calories such as carbonated drinks or candies.

### Protein

It's the main building block for new tissues, muscles, and antibodies to help fight infections. Give your child two servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese, and one or two servings of lean meat, poultry, fish, egg, tofu or tempeh daily to get enough protein.

### Other important nutrients for growth

When a child fails to maintain adequate weight gain, do your best to make up for it by ensuring he receives sufficient vitamins and minerals to catch-up on his growth. Insufficient intake will only exacerbate the situation and definitely lead to a less than ideal catch-up growth. Here are some of the important vitamins and minerals:

**Zinc.** Necessary for cells to grow and multiply properly, it is needed during rapid growth phases. It also helps in building protein and supporting a healthy immune system. Studies show that having sufficient zinc is important for catch-up growth and supplementation may be needed but do check with your doctor first before doing so.

**Iron.** A crucial mineral for carrying oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body and a vital component of the brain tissue. Deficiencies may lead to slower-than-normal nerve impulses and/or permanent damage to a child's brain, especially if it happens during his first two years of life. Do consult your doctor before opting for iron supplements.

**Vitamin A.** For proper vision development, necessary in visual-cognitive learning. A local study, South East Asian Nutrition Surveys (SEANUTS), found that 1 in 25 children were vitamin A deficient.

**Calcium & vitamin D.** For strong bones, teeth and good oral health. Deficiencies may cause rickets, muscle weakness and/or delayed motor development. The SEANUTS survey found that vitamin D deficiency was high and affected nearly 1 in 2 children. To maximise catch-up growth, include food rich in, or fortified with, calcium and vitamin D such as milk, in his diet.

## Focus on wholesome nutrition

Parents should take the holistic approach towards nutrition and provide their child with a variety of nutrient-rich foods from early life to support the balanced and wholesome development of his cognitive and physical growth. **All nutrients are important, so don't focus too much on one specific nutrient.**

As parents, the onus is on you to look into the nutritional needs of your child. Avoid being overly reliant on others, e.g. caretakers, house-helpers or grandparents. Be more proactive in monitoring your child's growth and development. Encourage him to be more physically active by including physical activities as part of regular family activities. **PP**



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*There are many factors for parents to consider when buying food and produce at the market. Apart from nutritional value, one should also pay attention to food safety and quality.*

# Make Safe Food Choices

By **Dr Yasmin Ooi**, Nutritionist and Member of Nutrition Society of Malaysia

Food safety means ensuring the food is safe from chemical, physical or biological risks starting from production until consumption. This is important as it prevents health hazards linked to unsafe food. Contaminated food may contain pathogens that can cause foodborne illnesses such as food poisoning, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A and dysentery.

During the Movement Control Order which began in March 2020, people started to cook at home more often, requiring them to buy more raw

ingredients from the market. Delivery services also increased greatly. Hence, it is crucial to be mindful about food safety while shopping.

## From farms and factories...

Food safety starts during food production, in farms and factories, before the produce and products enter the market. From the legal perspective, Malaysia has the Food Act 1983 and Food Regulations 1985 to regulate food production and trade.

Comprehensive local and international standards, such as ISO 22000 (international food safety standard), MyGAP (Malaysian Good Agricultural Practice), GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice), HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) and MeSTI (*Makanan Selamat Tanggungjawab Industri*, Food Safety is Responsibility of the Industry Certification Scheme) are also implemented to ensure and control food safety and quality during the various stages of production.



## ...to carts and baskets

Most consumers do not have control on food production, but we can control our purchasing habits at the market.

Here are some tips to ensure safe food purchasing:



- **Prioritise hygiene.** Firstly, choose a clean market to do your shopping. Do regularly wash your reusable shopping bags. It is also a good practice to sanitise your shopping cart or basket.



- **Inspect the packaging.** Make sure there are no holes or tears. Avoid dented, rusted or bloated packaging. Check if the safety seals are intact.

- **Check the date.** A product should not be sold or consumed after it has passed its **"expiry"** or **"use by"** date, even if it still looks edible. On the other hand, a product will remain at its best quality until its **"best before"** date and can still be consumed after that, if it has not spoilt.

- **Trace product origin.** Ensure that the addresses of manufacturer and distributor

are indicated on the packaging so you can trace the origin of the product. Some products have QR codes to trace their original sources, as well as points of production and distribution.

- **Verify product authenticity.** Be alert if there are any cases of counterfeit products. Do your research and check for signs of authenticity on the packaging as informed by the original manufacturers.

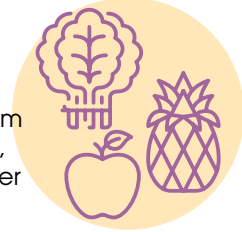
- **Pick items in order.** This is where a shopping list comes in handy. For your weekly grocery trips, it would be ideal to pick non-perishable and dry items first. Get refrigerated or frozen items and fresh produce towards the end. Place fruits and veggies on top of the cart.

- **Separate food types.** Put frozen foods together



to keep cool longer. Keep meat, poultry and seafood in plastic bags/containers to prevent water from leaking onto other items. Separate them from veggies, fruits and other foods.

- **Bring home quickly.** Perishable foods should not be out of refrigeration for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour in hot weather). Use a cooler box if you have to go somewhere else after grocery shopping. On a hot day, put the food in the car, instead of the boot.



## Food & grocery delivery

- Choose restaurants that you are sure of its quality and hygiene, e.g. restaurants you have frequented before.
- It's better if the restaurant has BeSS (*Bersih, Selamat dan Sihat*, Clean, Safe and Healthy) certification. Ask or check online before ordering.
- Good food premises will attach a ticket to inform when the food was prepared. Discard food if it was in transit for more than 4 hours.
- Check the food or product packaging for any damages or contamination when receiving the order.
- Do not accept food or groceries that look or smell bad upon receipt. Inform the premise about this.

Every year, foodborne diseases cause millions to fall ill and many to die, with a majority of victims being children. These diseases lead to significant disruptions in life, especially to vulnerable groups such as infants, young children, the elderly and people with chronic disease or compromised immunity. Hence, it is important to prevent foodborne diseases by practising good hygiene and taking precautionary measures as outlined above. **PP**

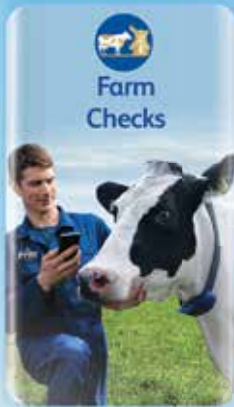
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*Making friends may look like something that is easy and effortless but it can be challenging to some children. And just like any relationship, keeping and maintaining friendships also require work.*

# Making New Friends

By **Dr Yang Wai Wai**, Clinical Child Psychologist

The first friends for children are usually their siblings, followed by cousins or neighbours, then classmates from nursery and kindergarten. Every child has a different temperament and character. Even friendly ones need some time to warm up to others and to establish a relationship. The most confident of children may also face difficulties making friends, especially if their approach is too strong for a quiet child. Fortunately, making friends is a skill that can be developed, and parents have a big role to play in teaching children how to make friends.

## Encourage their social skills

Parents can start by helping children develop the necessary social skills, and these include conversational skills, emotional self-control and interpersonal skills. Children who are good at interpersonal skills such as empathy, perspective-taking and moral reasoning are usually popular and well-liked by their peers.



There are three main aspects to help your child get started:

- **Be an emotion**

**coach.** Talk to your child about her feelings in an understanding and helpful way. This helps her to learn and regulate her own emotions better, which may lead to enhanced empathy and the ability to show



concern for others. Open communication will also give you opportunities to gain insight from her emotional experiences in her social world.

- **Practise authoritative parenting.**

Include thoughtful discussions and explanations on rules as this will help shape behaviours within a warm relationship. Children raised this way tend to be more self-reliant, less aggressive and have better self-control when interacting with others.

- **Be a good role model in effective communication.**

In addition to engaging her in give-and-take dialogues, practise active listening with her – this includes making appropriate eye contact and orienting your body to her when she talks. Be sure to pay full attention to what she says and give appropriate responses to indicate you're listening. Remember that children watch and learn from adults (and less from what you tell them) so be mindful when talking with others.

## Provide ideas about conversation

Your child may be at a loss on how to start and end a conversation. Teach her the basics and show her how you use them when interacting with others. You can also show her how to cope with social situations she may have trouble with, such as joining in when others are playing and what to do or say.

You can practice with your child. If she feels awkward, you can try using her toys to represent people and show her how a conversation might flow from there.

Ultimately, you should still progress to face-to-face conversations with her (by role-playing) as this will help her better recognise body language. Avoid being an interviewer or hogging the conversation – you want her to speak for herself!

## Simple conversation basics for kids

- **Start with a greeting.** There are many ways to get a conversation started, and most start with a simple greeting, e.g. "Hi, my name is Aishah. What's yours?", "What are you playing/doing?" or "Can I play too?"
- **What to talk about?** Conversation topics can make or break the flow of any conversation. There are a wide range of topics that can be used, e.g. "What's your favourite game/food/colour?"
- **Take turns during conversations.** Teach your child to share and listen during conversation. A simple way to engage the other person is with open-ended questions, e.g. "There are so many cartoons I wonder which one you think is the best?", "I like fried chicken and watermelon juice. How about you?" or "Why do you like blue colour?"
- **How to end a conversation?** It's important to teach your child how to end a conversation politely, e.g. "It was nice to talk with you," or "I have to go, see you later!"

## Humans are social beings

The development of interpersonal skills are important as your child will benefit by being able to socialise better with others. Those who are able to make good friends will enjoy social support in their lives for the things they do and the

experiences they go through. A lucky few may even enjoy friendships that last a lifetime. So make it a point to build up her social skills by teaching and guiding her at every opportunity. **PP**

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# Substance Abuse in Teenagers

By **Dr Thiagar Nadarajaw**, Consultant Paediatrician & Adolescent Medicine Specialist

*Teenagers face many challenges as they grow up and mature into adults. Substance abuse is one of the pitfalls that they (and their parents) need to be aware of and guard against.*

According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS 2017), 1 in 10 secondary school students in Malaysia smoke cigarettes. You may not think of tobacco or cigarettes as drugs, but one can get addicted to it just like other drugs. **Substance abuse is defined as the harmful use of psychoactive substances, including tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs, which can lead to addiction and other short- and long-term complications.**

## Substance abuse in numbers\*

- **1 in 25** have used drugs
- **1 in 10** smoke
- **1 in 10** drink alcohol

*\* from NHMS 2017, among 13-17 years olds in 212 secondary schools.*

## Why do teens do it?

It is important to understand the factors that may cause teens to become involved with substance abuse.

- **Peer pressure.** Teenagers may start taking drugs

or other substances to fit in a group. Often, they are coaxed to try the substance by their friends, who seem to enjoy it. This leads them to believe it is cool or fun to take drugs. A history of substance abuse in the family may also be a contributing factor, especially if the parents are current users.

- **Mental health.** Some teenagers with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, conduct disorder and compulsive behaviour take drugs to release their stress. They may use

prescription drugs such as pain killers, stimulants and depressants.

- **Low confidence.** One of the effects of drugs is loss of social inhibition. Many teenagers take drugs to boost their confidence during certain activities, which they are normally too shy and fearful of doing.
- **Media portrayal.** Smoking, drinking and drug use are often portrayed by the media and in pop culture as common among teenagers and in the community. This normalises the high risk behaviour and indirectly encourages teenagers to consume drugs and other harmful substances.
- **Impulsive behaviour.** Teens tend to seek out new experiences, particularly high risk behaviour, perceiving it as thrilling. Boredom can also be a factor, as they have difficulty keeping themselves occupied. Hence, they seek excitement in the form of drugs to fill the void in their lives and get instant gratification.

## Types of substance abuse

- Ecstasy
- Cannabis (marijuana)
- *Ketum* leaves
- Methamphetamine (*syabu*)
- Cocaine
- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Vaping
- Inhalants (e.g. glue)
- Stimulants
- Painkillers
- Anti-anxiety drugs

## Changes in behaviour

There are many behavioural changes which may indicate substance abuse by teens, including:

- Loss of appetite, lack of energy, agitation, changes in speech, sluggish, excessive sleeping and unsteady gait.
- Skip school and their grades may drop.
- Stop participating in the usual school activities.
- Start stealing money from home and others to purchase drugs.
- Appear to be in a daze or restless, and unduly angry or sad.



Most substance abusers need assistance to break free from the habit.

## What can parents do?

Sadly, substance abuse is common among teenagers. Here's what you can do to prevent it.

- **Maintain a stress-free environment** at home and school as much as possible. Create a safe, disciplined and supportive home environment.
- Be a **good role model** to your teen. Abstain from drug abuse and try to stop smoking and excessive drinking. Remember to praise him and reward his good behaviour.
- **Get to know his circle of friends.** If you think your teen is in bad company, encourage him to make other friends.
- **Do not leave him unsupervised.** Spend time talking with your teen about his day. Keep updated with his activities without imposing excessively on him.

- Encourage your teen to **participate in healthy activities** such as hobbies, sports and part time jobs to keep him occupied. Teenagers who occupy their time well are less likely to get involved in substance abuse.
- You must **be well informed** about the symptoms and signs of substance abuse. Get professional help if you suspect your teen is experimenting or misusing harmful substances. Support your teen throughout rehabilitation and after recovery.

All parties, including parents, teachers and the community, play a role in preventing substance abuse, educating teenagers and supporting them towards recovery. Be ready to extend a helping hand to teenagers when they are in need. Do not hesitate to seek professional help for them.

### Resources to help substance abusers

- National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) (03-89112233/019-6262233)
- Cure & Care 1Malaysia Clinic
- Drug Rehabilitation Centre (Pusat Pemulihan Penagihan Narkotik (PUSPEN))
- Malaysian Drug Prevention Association (PEMADAM) (03-20941190) **PP**

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