



Health Nexus Weekly Bulletin COVID-19 and Best Start Conference 2020

In this issue:

- COVID-19 Updates and Resources
 - Physical Distancing versus Social Distancing
 - COVID-19 Screening Tool from the Government of Canada
 - COVID-19 and Children
 - COVID-19 Resources and Supports for Families
 - COVID-19 in the FASD Context
 - Supporting Families and Children during Physical Distancing (Social Distancing)
 - Additional COVID-19 Resources for Providers
- Health Nexus Updates
 - Best Start Building Healthy Brains Conference 2020: Follow-up

COVID-19 UPDATES AND RESOURCES

PHYSICAL DISTANCING VERSUS SOCIAL DISTANCING

"Physical Distancing is the new Social Distancing" - Dr. Theresa Tam.

On March 25th, 2020, Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, started using the term "[Physical Distancing](#)" instead of "Social Distancing" to acknowledge the importance of social interactions using virtual communication tools during COVID-19 Pandemic.

While Canadians follow Health Canada directions in response to control the

spread of COVID-19, individuals and families do not need to be socially isolated during this stressful time.

SCREENING TOOL FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA



On March 23rd, 2020, Ontario launched a new and updated [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) for virtual screening.

The tool can be used by anyone who thinks they may have symptoms of COVID-19 or may have been in contact with someone with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19.

It provides the province with real-time data on the number and geography of users who are told to seek care, self-isolate or to monitor for symptoms. This data will help inform Ontario's ongoing response to keep individuals and families safe.

Health Canada also has the national [COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#) for people living in provinces and territories without a specific locally-developed tool.

COVID-19 AND CHILDREN



Currently, healthy children are not considered at higher risk for COVID-19, and there is no evidence to date suggesting that symptoms of COVID-19 are different in children versus adults. However, protecting children from possible exposure to COVID-19 is very important.

The reported symptoms in children are similar to those of adults and include cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough, as well as vomiting and diarrhea.

Both **Health Canada** and the **CDC** advise against wearing a mask on a healthy child, as it “may give a false sense of security and there is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use and disposal” (Health Canada, 2020).

Parents and children are advised about the importance of social isolation and social distancing when there is a need to leave the house, as well as frequent hand washing and not touching their face.

For children experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, a mask is recommended. Health Canada states that in this case, the masks are an appropriate part of infection prevention and control measures to avoid the transmission of the virus to others, and need to be changed frequently.

For more information, please visit:

- **Government of Canada** [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\): Prevention and Risks](#)
- **Canadian Paediatric Society** [Caring for Kids webpage on The 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- **CDC** [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

COVID-19 RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES



Parents and caregivers are encouraged to talk to children about changes that are currently happening to their routines and the reasons for staying at home. Also, kids need to be taught about the importance of maintaining physical (social) distancing and practicing strategies to reduce the risks of exposure to COVID-19.

Remember: reassurance, active listening, and validation of children's feelings are important to help them cope with stress and anxiety related to COVID-19.

Here are the links to important resources about COVID-19 communication with children.

- **Canadian Pediatric Society** [recommendation on being “realistically reassuring” about COVID-19](#)
- [Article by the Canadian Pediatric Society on Helping Children and Teens Cope with Stressful Public Events – parent resource](#)
- **Parenting Now** [Tips for Talking to Children about COVID-19](#)
- **Niagara Region** [videos on Talking to Kids about COVID-19](#)

COVID-19 IN THE FASD CONTEXT



Care for the Caregivers – Suggestions For Managing Stress and Isolation.

These are unprecedented and unsettling times for families experiencing Complex Neurodevelopmental Disabilities including FASD. Evidence has shown that

families do better with direct support (support groups for example), respite, well-established routines, and consistency.

Currently, communities are looking for a way to substitute for these supports, which means that the parenting journey can be much more challenging than usual.

Below is a list of tips and strategies on managing stress while remembering the importance to care for a caregiver.

- Fun family meetings – meal planning and weekly planning with all members contributing, i.e., favourite meals.
- Create or re-create a chore or homework list with pictures.
- 15-30-minute reading or quiet time after supper for a parent – no interrupt zone to nurture parent relationship and self-care (quiet time for the parent where they can do something they enjoy, e.g., read, take a bath, sit quietly with a cup of tea, etc. if two parents are there, it can be helpful for one to relieve the other).
- Planned breaks/respite however you can get it: in-home respite is possible by dividing people up, and/or watching a favourite movie.
- Focus on what is going well – it's o.k. to do "less than usual" or to lower the expectations regarding schoolwork, screen time, and personal responsibilities.
- Reach out by phone, face time and on-line platforms as much as possible to friends and family as well as for information and entertainment, i.e., online music concerts.
- Finally, parents and caregivers are encouraged to connect with local community supports as required for options regarding respite, online learning support, and activities for children/youth and for personal mental wellness support.

Parents and caregivers of people with developmental disabilities are invited to participate in ongoing Mindfulness Mondays, a webinar that is offered online through CAMH. For more information please contact Brianne Redquest at brianne.redquest@camh.ca

Health Nexus will be offering bi-weekly webinars for FASD support group facilitators to explore tips and strategies that will help them support the individuals in their groups and their communities during this unsettling time. Details are to be confirmed and will be posted here <https://en.healthnexus.ca/FASDSupportGroups>.

Up to date links to FASD resources, FASD Workers/Coordinators, as well as current events and training, can be found at <https://www.fasdinfectsaf.ca/en/>.

For additional information and questions, please contact: Angela Geddes CYW, BA (Psych), MSW, RSW – FASD Family and Caregiver Support Group Project Coordinator at a.geddes@healthnexus.ca.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN DURING PHYSICAL (SOCIAL) DISTANCING



Using Brain Science to Boost Family Resilience During Pandemic Response.

For many families, physical (social) distancing and isolation pose a significant challenge, especially in the context of rapidly changing environments. During these difficult times, families are encouraged to take the opportunity to boost resilience and engage in interactive tools and recommendations, such as the Brain Story.

Reflecting on the knowledge and evidence presented at Health Nexus Best Start Building Healthy Brains Conference, family and early years providers can incorporate the following key concepts into practice when caring for parents, caregivers and children, especially during the time of family social isolation:

- “*Toxic stress*” is a force that disrupts brain architecture, and occurs when no supportive caregivers are around to buffer the body’s response to repeated negative experiences.
- “*Serve and Return*” interactions build sturdy brain architecture.
- “*Resilience*” is the ability to stay healthy even in circumstances of severe stress.
- “*Air Traffic Control*” is the “executive function” system of the brain. Strong brain architecture supports the development of integrated cognitive, social, and emotional skills (“executive function”) which operated like “air traffic control” in a child’s mental airspace.

To find out more about the concepts above and evidence on Adverse Childhood Experiences, please visit:

- **Alberta Family Wellness:** [Brain Story Toolkit](#)
- **Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addictions:** [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#)



Parent and Caregiver Tips During Pandemic.

Establishing routines according to the family’s best abilities and resources, and encouraging children to participate in meaningful activities can help families cope with the demands of increasing caregiver burden.

Parents of children 0 – 60 months can access [Comfort, Play and Teach Resources](#) by **Infant Mental Health Promotion**, that will guide them through at-home activities according to the child's age.

Pathways is another excellent resource supporting families and caregivers with videos and written materials on how to interact and play with children 0 – 6 years of age.

Talking is Teaching has also developed a [toolkit](#) for parents to help them stay engaged with their children and organize their daily routines.

Parents and caregivers can also access [Mental Health Works webinars](#) by the **Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario Branch** to learn more about supporting their mental health during physical (social) distancing and isolation.

For more information on Building Healthy Brains and Brain Science, developmental resources for infants and children and supporting caregiver mental health, please contact Health Nexus Health Promotion Consultants at beststart@healthnexus.ca.

All in all, it is important to remember that supportive and engaged caregivers matter!

ADDITIONAL COVID-19 RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

Health Nexus has convened a group of community care providers to provide Rapid Response Guidance for families and care providers. To submit questions, become part of the rapid response team or offer support, please contact Best Start at info@healthnexus.ca.

Provincial Council for Maternal And Child Health has issued comprehensive [Practice Support Tools for Obstetrics, Neonatal and Paediatrics](#). The inventory includes practice support tools from various local, provincial, federal and international organizations. The information is presented in reverse chronological order and is updated as new information is made available.

BORN Ontario has relaunched its OMama website and app. Please visit www.OMama.com for curated resources for expectant and new parents.

Witnessing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of our vulnerable populations and marginalized communities is an eye-opening experience. **Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University** provides an insightful [statement](#) on the possible effects of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations and emphasizes the importance of working collaboratively to

support caregivers and children during these difficult times.

Increased screen time for children during physical (social) distancing and isolation has also been recognized as an issue amongst family and child care providers. To learn more about this issue and possibly get answers to your questions, please register for the webinar hosted by **Canadian Pediatric Society** on [*Social Distancing as a Family: Screen Time Strategies and Resources.*](#)

HEALTH NEXUS UPDATES

BEST START CONFERENCE 2020 – BUILDING HEALTHY BRAINS: FOLLOW-UP



On March 5-6, 2020, **Health Nexus** hosted its annual Best Start Conference. The conference enabled 350 participants to exchange knowledge about how building brain science into community programs is strengthening resilience and improving health and human services outcomes for everyone.

After the conference, we invited participants to fill out a survey asking them to share their experience and knowledge application.

Here are the results!

- **81%** agreed or strongly agreed that the conference provided practical evidence-based strategies that can be integrated into their practice/program.
- **88%** agreed or strongly agreed that they intend to apply what they have learned at the conference in the next 6 months.
- **60%** rated their *knowledge* of Brain Science as **High** compared to **27%** of participants before the conference.
- **23%** rated their *knowledge* as **Very High** after the conference (in comparison to 9% pre-conference).
- **55%** rated their *confidence* in Brain Science as **High** compared to **23%** of participants before the conference.
- **28%** rated their confidence as **Very High** after the conference (in comparison to 10% pre-conference).

Visit [our resources page](#) to discover all our many evidence-based, up-to-date resources!



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