Can kids transmit the new coronavirus?

School reopening depends on a better understanding of this question.

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Whether children can transmit the coronavirus (officially named SARS-CoV-2) to one another and to adults is one of the key questions that must be answered when considering whether it is safe to reopen schools.

Kids are less likely to develop severe COVID-19—they often have no symptoms—and early in the pandemic, it appeared that they might not acquire the virus or spread it as readily as adults.

But a growing body of evidence indicates that children do in fact transmit SARS-CoV-2. One recent study, for example, found that they can carry higher levels of the coronavirus in their airways. This means that children, like adults, should take precautions such as social distancing and wearing face masks—which can be a challenge for young kids!

Some countries never closed their elementary schools, and some have successfully reopened them. Countries such as Finland have not seen coronavirus clusters linked to schools reopening, but others such as Israel have. In the United States, schools that reopened in several states have had to shut down again due to outbreaks. Experts say reopening schools remains risky in areas where viral transmission has not been contained at a low level.

This applies to younger kids. Teens and young adults appear to transmit the virus at a rate similar to that of older adults, and several outbreaks have been reported at American colleges and universities. Although they are less likely than adults to become seriously ill, young adults can develop severe COVID-19.

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