

COVID-19 and Preterm Children

Common concerns and questions from parents about how Covid-19 may affect their preterm child

Is my preterm born child at more risk of contracting Covid-19 and becoming seriously unwell?

While most children who get Covid-19 have mild illness, current evidence shows some children with additional medical conditions might have a higher risk of getting sick.

At the moment, it is not possible to determine if children born preterm are at increased risk from contracting Covid-19, or becoming seriously unwell if they do. This is why it is important for parents to seek advice if they are concerned about their child's vulnerability. If your child has recently been discharged from the newborn nursery, the neonatal team at the hospital are well placed to discuss the concerns you have. Otherwise, your GP or other health professional who knows your child's medical history will be able to provide you with relevant information.

Should I send my ex-prem child to childcare or school?

It is natural that some parents worry about their child going to childcare, kindergarten or school (when they are open), particularly if their child has had ongoing health challenges as a result of being born early.

Parents should discuss their individual circumstances and options with their child's GP or health professional.

Are there known concerns with ex-prems receiving a Covid-19 vaccine when available to their age group?

All children 12 years and older are now eligible for vaccination against Covid-19. There have been no studies of immunisation in children born preterm to be certain if such children are at additional risk of harm from the immunisation itself.

The Immunisation Service at the Royal Children's Hospital provides specialist immunisation advice for any concerned families. If you have any questions, they can be contacted on 03 9345 6599 or email immunisation.centre@rch.org.au. You can also discuss this with your child's GP or health professional.

Is there anything I can do to protect my preterm child from Covid-19?

The most positive things families with children who were born preterm can do to protect their child are:



Vaccinate everyone in the household as soon as they become eligible



Follow government restrictions that prevent contact with Covid-19, such as staying at home and not having anyone visit your home



Wear a mask when out in the community



Distance from other people as much as possible when out in the community

Key Messages

- The rate at which ex-prems are infected with or become seriously unwell with Covid is unclear
- The best protection for a child born too early is for those around them to be vaccinated and adhere to the most up to date health recommendations & restrictions
- It is recommended parents discuss any concerns with their child's GP or health professional

The CRE in Newborn Medicine recommends the Royal Children's Hospital Covid Resources for relevant, current information regarding children and Covid [www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_\(COVID-19\)/#resources](http://www.rch.org.au/rch/Coronavirus_(COVID-19)/#resources)