

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### **Brain Health Matters and Understanding How Children Spread COVID-19 Makes a Difference**

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Today, the BHI is talking about the potential role children play in spreading COVID-19 and raising awareness about the potential neurologic and mental health implications of the virus and from the experience of the pandemic.*

For the past eight months, researchers have been focused on learning everything they can about COVID-19. They are looking at how it spreads, and why some people develop mild or no symptoms, while others develop life-threatening illness. They are also looking at the role age plays in both contracting and spreading the virus. New research from Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) points to children playing a bigger role in spreading the virus.

The study provides critical data showing that children have a greater impact on the community spread of COVID-19 than previously thought. The study of 192 children ages 0-22, showed children who tested positive for COVID-19 had a significantly higher level of virus in their airways than adults hospitalized in ICUs for COVID-19 treatment — even though many of them had mild or no symptoms of the virus.

These surprising findings are significant because a high viral load means a greater likelihood of transmission of the virus. Additionally, the symptoms of COVID-19 — like fever, runny nose and cough — often overlap with common childhood illnesses, making it harder to diagnose COVID-19 in children.

In the [Harvard Gazette](#), senior author of the study and director of the Mucosal Immunology and Biology Research Center at MGH, Alessio Fasano, said: “Kids are not immune from this infection, and their symptoms don’t correlate with exposure and infection. During this COVID-19 pandemic, we have mainly screened symptomatic subjects, so we have reached the erroneous conclusion

that the vast majority of people infected are adults. However, our results show that kids are not protected against this virus. We should not discount children as potential spreaders for this virus.”

Many students are now attending school in-person or participating in a hybrid learning (attending school online and in-person), athletic, and social activities. When attending school or other events they may be exposed to other children who are positive for COVID-19, but asymptomatic. While children with COVID-19 are not as likely to become seriously ill, they are at greater risk for spreading the virus or bringing it into their homes. This is especially concerning for at-risk families and multi-generational families with vulnerable older adults in the same household.

The study, “Pediatric SARS-CoV-2: Clinical Presentation, Infectivity, and Immune Responses,” was published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

How do you continue to protect your family’s brain and body health from exposure to COVID-19? The study emphasizes the best way to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 for all ages is to know the symptoms and practice effective infection control measures. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recommends:

- **Wash your hands — often.** Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Avoid close contact.** Avoid close contact with family members or others in your home who are sick. Outside your home, put 6 feet of distance between yourself and others.
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a mask.** Despite the controversy, masks work. Everyone should wear a mask out in public and when around people who don’t live in your household. The exceptions are children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. And remember, a mask is not a substitute for social distancing.
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.** Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- **Clean and disinfect.** Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. If surfaces are dirty, clean them using detergent or soap and water prior to using a household disinfectant.
- **Check your health, and your temperature, daily.** Know the symptoms of COVID-19 and be alert for them. Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or loss of taste or smell. Follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- **Get a flu shot.** When flu season meets the COVID-19 pandemic it will likely put a strain on healthcare resources. The flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, but it does reduce the risk of serious flu illness, hospitalization, and death.
- And finally, protect your family by **adopting a brain healthy lifestyle**, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses and language that promote:
  - Stress resilience

- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Sleep
- Social connection
- Emotional wellbeing
- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

**About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org))**

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).