

COVID 19 and Pediatric ITP: What You Need to Know

At this time, there is no evidence that children with ITP have a greater risk to develop severe COVID-19 symptoms due to their autoimmune disorder or treatments. In fact, it appears that COVID19 occurs less frequently in children and cases that do occur appear to be less severe. Recently there has been a delayed form of “COVID19” seen in children that does not appear to be directly related to infection but rather to an immune reaction that occurs after the infection is over. It resembles a disease called Kawasaki syndrome or Juvenile inflammatory arthritis with rash, fever, and blood vessel inflammation that can affect many parts of the body. Fortunately, this problem, while severe, is relatively very rare and is not related at all to ITP as far as we know.

In regard to ITP there is no evidence at all that contracting this virus will affect your child’s platelet count above and beyond what any viral infection would do. Around the United States and the world, pediatric hematologists are just beginning to see cases of ITP infected by the SARS-Cov-2 virus. There are very limited numbers of these cases thus far and it is thus not possible to make any comments about them. It is worth noting that in both adults and children with ITP, testing has not yet been so universally available that all cases of ITP, whether de novo or already identified, are tested to find out if they are SARS-Cov-2 infected. We believe that increasingly this will become standard of care for at least a while.

Children with ITP already worry about their disorder and the uncertainty it carries, and COVID-19 fears may also impact their mental health. It is important to protect the psychological well-being of children affected by ITP¹. Here are some suggestions on things you can do to help your child with ITP at this time which may even serve to reduce some of their potential fears. These will need to be individualized to your child and his/her age.

- Encourage positive communication through interactive methods – while coloring or engaged in active play, encourage your child to talk about their feelings so you can reassure them you will keep them safe.
- Explain preventative strategies – by explaining to children why it is important to wash their hands, wear a mask out in public, social distance from their friends, and avoid touching their face, they may gain a sense of control reducing their anxiety and risks to contract the virus.
- Establishing and maintaining a routine and good habits – routines may help your child feel a sense of predictability and control during a time of uncertainty. This can help reduce anxiety and increase their overall well-being.
- Online education – can be a way to distract and engage your child while learning at the same time.
- Virtual physical activities – you could encourage your child to participate safely in virtual games such as online dance parties, or other active games.
- When your neighborhood prepares to open up, it is important to explain that this is not an all or nothing phenomenon. For instance, you can go outside but need to maintain social distancing.

- Similarly, if your child feels targeted compared to other children who may be less careful than you are asking them to be, it is important to remind them:
 - It is not because of their ITP. You are trying to keep them and you safe. If you explain that you (the parents and older relatives) may get very sick if you become infected and therefore you are asking your children to protect you, it might be easier for them to follow your advice.
 - Also, as in non-COVID19 related behavior, it is better not to use “ITP” as an excuse for not allowing certain activities such as sleepovers, school trips, etc. In the short run it is easier to “blame” the ITP but in the long run it may add to your child’s fearfulness
1. *Lassandro et al. (2020). Covid-19 and Children with Immune Thrombocytopenia: Emerging Issues. Letter to the Editor. Mediterranean Journal of Hematology and Infectious Diseases.*
<http://mjhid.org/index.php/mjhid/article/view/2020.028>