

Media Contact

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Baby Development During COVID-19

Attribute to: Cynthia Ambler, MD, pediatrics at Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital

Should I bring my baby in for vaccines? Can some vaccines safely be delayed?

The AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) is recommending that pediatric offices stay open if possible and continue to do “well visits” for their patients who are under two years old and require vaccines. Right now the recommendation is to hold off on any well visit for children over two years old. A great resource being used by many medical offices is the telemedicine visit. This is a great option for parents to consider if available to them. It involves either a video or audio encounter with your child’s doctor. I strongly recommend that parents call their child’s doctor and consider a telemedicine visit to discuss any questions or concerns regarding the health or development of their child during this COVID-19 epidemic. I think I speak for all pediatricians when I say that we are still here for you and want to continue to provide care for your child during this pandemic even if we cannot do a face-to-face encounter.



**Cynthia Ambler, MD, pediatrics
at Northwestern Medicine
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Babies are around screens a lot more now. Is there anything to know about screen time and its influence on a baby’s development?

In 2016 the AAP put out guidelines regarding screen time, recommending limiting screen time especially in children under 18 months. Basically, too much screen time has been linked to obesity and poor sleep and possible lower classroom performance. This makes sense. Kids who are sitting in front of a screen for hours a day are not interacting as much with their environment, not getting as much exercise and not having as much interaction with their parents, siblings and friends. During this pandemic we are all likely doing more screen time than we normally would. Let’s try to do the best that we can. Use high quality programming, limit it when you can and give yourself and your children some grace as well. I feel like just as in every other area of life we need to balance. We need to balance our media use with our other behaviors. For many school age and teenage kids right now, the only “social interaction” they are having with their friends is through video games. Just like everything else, let’s use moderation. If I want a treat, I eat a couple of cookies. I don’t eat the whole box. Balance your media time and your child’s media time to the best of your ability. Also, video chatting is not categorized by the AAP as screen time so use that to help your kids stay connected and engaged. Let your kids video chat, let them see you video chatting with your friends, let your babies be in the room when your older kids are video chatting with their friends.

How will a lack of interaction with new and different people affect my baby's development?

The good news about babies, and children in general, is that they are very resilient and they learn in so many different ways. They learn by seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. Right now the biggest limitation is the touching. They can't touch many other people, but with the use of video chats they can still experience having new visual and auditory interactions even during this time of social distancing. Here are some ideas:

- Have your babies sit in the room while their siblings are face timing their friends. They will see and hear many different faces and voices.
- Get a digital picture frame that rotates pictures of your family and friends or a good old photo album for your baby to look at. At my office I have noted over the years that babies love to look at pictures and videos of themselves! Parents sometimes pull out their phones when a child gets distressed during my exam and it immediately distracts them and soothes them.
- Take them for walks outside or sit on your back porch – they can hear the birds, smell the neighbor's barbeque, see the early blooms on the trees and bushes.
- If your baby has an older sibling, try to engage his/her help in thinking up ways to interact with the baby. Have them sort things by color, then by shape or size. Play different kinds of music and keep track of how the baby responds, and ask your older child which ones he/she likes best too.
- Keep a consistent daily routine. Kids absolutely thrive on routine. Maintain a consistent sleep routine and healthy eating and an exercise routine as well. Those are very important factors in a child's development.

My baby tends to have "stranger danger" and we were seeing some improvement before the social distancing order. Will we be able to get her back to where she was?

Stranger danger is actually a normal developmental milestone for babies. Around the age of 6 to 12 months, a baby begins to distinguish between their family/caretakers and strangers. Most children go through that phase without an issue and it naturally diminishes during the second year of life. I would recommend continuing to have your child "interact" with others during video chats but I think there is very little reason for concern. However, if an older child has a history of social anxiety disorder or severe shyness and you are concerned about how the social distancing will affect them, I would reach out to your child's doctor for guidance.

The number one goal is to keep yourself and your child emotionally and physically healthy during this trying time. Do your best and try to stay calm because our kids are watching us and learning from us all the time. We will all get through this and keep up the good work, parents!