



**ARTICLE**

# **How the coronavirus is affecting vulnerable children**

And what Christians can do to help

**BY CHELSEA PATTERSON SOBOLIK**

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COVID-19 has swiftly changed the lives of millions, both in the United States and abroad. Daily rhythms and schedules have been dramatically altered, and millions of people find themselves sheltering-in-place. Times of immense stress can make us fearful and anxious, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to be paralyzed by anxiety. In the midst of this global pandemic, Christians should consider not only how to care wisely for their families, but should give serious thought to how to love and care for others. The coronavirus is affecting the

most vulnerable among us in profound ways—children and youth currently living in unsafe and abusive homes, those in foster care, and children awaiting adoption. Domestically and abroad, vulnerable children are suffering the impacts of the coronavirus, and Christians must be ready to stand in the gap for them.

## **Vulnerable children in the U.S.**

Our nation's child welfare system is tasked with the important job of ensuring that children live in safe, stable, and permanent environments. Right now, the child welfare system is facing unprecedented challenges as they seek to carry out this mission.

Research shows (<https://www.healthline.com/health/causes-of-child-abuse>) that increased stress can increase the probability that children will experience abuse or neglect within the home. Some of the stress factors that can lead to neglect or abuse include:

- A lack of support from family members, friends, neighbors, or the community
- Substance use disorder (likely to increase during times of immense stress)
- Physical or mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety
- Socioeconomic stress from financial issues, unemployment, or medical problems
- A lack of parenting skills to help cope with the pressures and struggles of raising a child

All of these stressors are likely to dramatically intensify during the coronavirus pandemic. Several states have already reported spikes in child abuses cases. Teachers, daycare workers, and medical professionals help provide extra sets of eyes on children, and can report potential abuse. But with schools going online, children at risk of abuse or neglect won't have that extra layer of protection.

The [economic impacts of the coronavirus \(https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-economy-layoffs-children-families-bad-d588cc93-ff26-4031-8be8-5654cce05a15.html\)](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-economy-layoffs-children-families-bad-d588cc93-ff26-4031-8be8-5654cce05a15.html) are going to hit the most vulnerable among us the hardest: singles, parents, poorer families, and low-income workers, many of whom often live paycheck to paycheck, with slim margins. Increased stress, combined with financial difficulties, could be potentially devastating for at-risk children.

Another effect of the coronavirus is that family courts have dramatically slowed down, prolonging the length of time a child remains in foster care, and delaying reunification with their biological parents. Finalized adoption visitations between children in foster care and their biological parents have also been paused due to safety concerns.

## **Vulnerable children internationally**

The coronavirus is also affecting the world's most vulnerable children. The [Department of State is advising](#)

[\(https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html\)](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html)

U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. Families who have spent months in the international adoption process will be unable to travel to finalize the adoption of their children. There's a lot of uncertainty around when it will be safe to travel again and when waiting

children will be brought home with their forever families. Because of the coronavirus, there will continue to be a spike in deaths, which will lead to more children losing one or both parents. On the other side of the pandemic, there will be even more children who need safe and loving families. Intercountry adoption should remain a viable option for welcoming those children into families.

Domestically and abroad, vulnerable children are suffering the impacts of the coronavirus, and Christians must be ready to stand in the gap for them.

  ([http://twitter.com/home/?status=twitterfy via @erlc](http://twitter.com/home/?status=twitterfy%20via%20@erlc))

It's important to remember that the coronavirus has likely been extraordinarily traumatic for children and youth who have existing trauma. For many vulnerable children, safety, security, and stability are often elusive, and this pandemic might cause even more fear and uncertainty in their hearts.

## How you can get involved

Below are a few ways you can get involved in caring for vulnerable children during the coronavirus crisis:

**Give:** Nonprofits are often on the frontlines of serving the most vulnerable, especially in the midst of this global pandemic. With so much uncertainty surrounding the long-term effects of the coronavirus, one practical step is to financially support organizations that are involved in caring for vulnerable children. Consider giving on a monthly basis, instead of a one-time gift, because the monthly support helps nonprofits have some financial stability.

**Get involved:** Pay attention to the children you're still coming into contact with, whether that's children in your neighborhood or children in your son's or daughter's virtual classroom. Keep a close eye out for signs of abuse or neglect. Many local child welfare organizations are currently gathering nonperishable food items for vulnerable families in their areas. Reach out to local ministries and see how you can safely serve in your community.

**Consider adoption:** The need for safe, permanent, and loving families is as great as it has ever been. There are thousands of children waiting for families, and that need will become greater in the weeks and months to come. Since many families are currently at home, now is an excellent time to begin the adoption process. Many adoption agencies will virtually walk families through the home study process. Now is a wonderful time to get a head start on the paperwork involved in becoming an adoptive family.

**Pray:** We should commit to pray for vulnerable children. Below are a few prayer prompts.

- We should pray that orphans and vulnerable children are cared for, safe, and loved in the midst of this pandemic.
- We should pray for families to consider opening their homes and hearts to vulnerable children through foster care or adoption.
- We should pray for social workers on the front lines and for child welfare agencies that are continuing to serve vulnerable children.

In the midst of these uncertain times, may we be people that show God's kindness and love to vulnerable children. May we pour out our time, talent, and treasure for the good of others and the glory of God.

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## Related Resources

### HUMAN DIGNITY

**Palmer Williams on dignity, disability, and COVID19**  
(<https://erlc.com/resource-library/capitol-conversations-episodes/palmer-williams-on-dignity-disability-and-covid19/>)

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# **How the Coronavirus is Affecting Vulnerable Children (<https://erlc.com/resource-library/spotlight-articles/how-the-coronavirus-is-affecting-vulnerable-children-2/>)**

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Global Hunger Relief (<http://www.globalhungerrelief.com/>)

Caring Well Initiative (<https://caringwell.com>)

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