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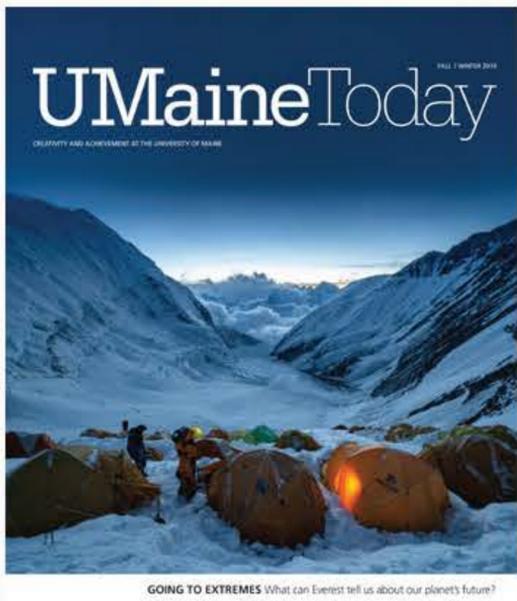
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UMaine Today



BDN speaks with Maginnis about how to teach kids about COVID-19

March 19, 2020

The [Bangor Daily News](#) spoke with Melissa Maginnis, an assistant professor of microbiology at the University of Maine, about how she's teaching her kids about the novel coronavirus. "We've seen the emergence of several of these viruses in the past couple decades, like SARS and MERS. It was predicted there would be another one that would emerge, and that it would transmit into humans. I wasn't surprised," said Maginnis. "Those other viruses, they were fairly well contained and then they fizzled. But in this case, the transmission rate is pretty high. It's not as high as measles, which is one of the most transmissible viruses we know of. It's not unlike the rate that the flu has, but coronavirus is higher than that, and it's much more deadly than the flu, and it shouldn't be compared to it." Maginnis runs a lab at UMaine to study human JC polyomavirus, which infects the majority of the population and is confined to the kidneys with no symptoms. In immunocompromised people, that virus can cause a rare and fatal brain infection with no known treatment or cure, the BDN reported. She is currently running the research at home, and she and her husband, fellow virologist Aaron Derdowski, also are educating her two children. "We talk about science a lot. My kids set up little labs in the living room. They write hypotheses in their notebooks. I bring home extra supplies from the lab sometimes, and they play science," she said of regular life. But now the pretend labs have turned into real instruction in the wake of school closures. "We just asked [our daughter], 'What do you want to learn about?'" said Maginnis. "And her eyes lit up. Kids are really hungry for knowledge. Especially for something like this, which her friends are talking about at school. She said people at school were saying, 'I don't want to get the coronavirus.' She was already doing her own research." Maginnis told the BDN about methods she uses to teach her children about the respiratory system, viruses, hand washing and more. And she said the way parents behave and communicate is just as important as the content they teach. "I think for a lot of kids, they're going to remember how they felt during this time. The details of what they learned might be a little fuzzy, but the basic concepts, and the emotions they had, will stick," she said. "How we react during this time is really important. We remember the experience of learning as much as we do the specifics."

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