



# COVID-19 Lockdowns Cause Global Screen Time Pandemic

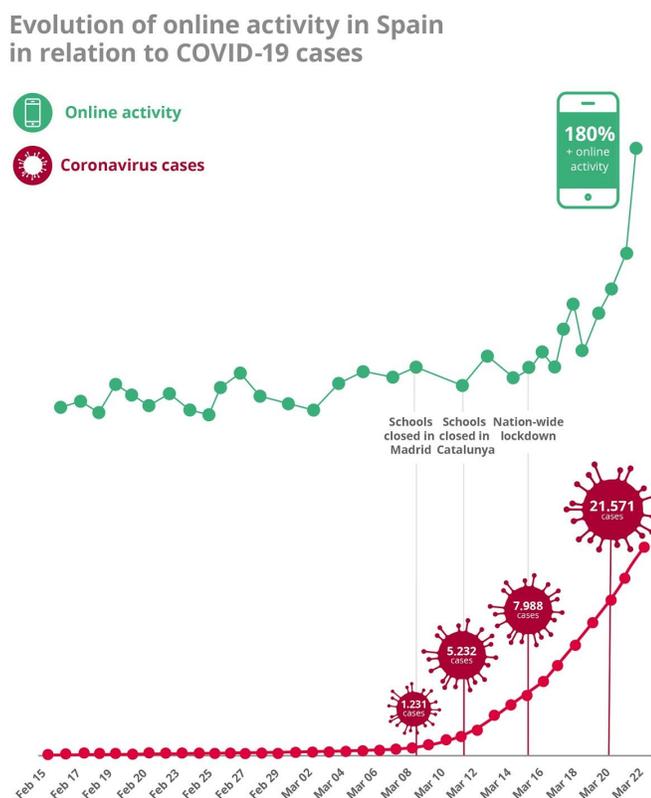
100% spike in activity online during coronavirus hits Spain, France and Italy; exposes children to unprecedented risks and ups pressures on maxed out parents to protect them. The US and the UK next to join the troublesome trend.

**March 24, 2020, New York** – As countries around the world take increasingly strict measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, **Qustodio's** analysis of internet behaviour related to the coronavirus clearly shows that in areas where governments close schools and impose strict lockdowns experience a more than 100% increase in online activity. The spike simultaneously exposes children

to additional online threats and is forcing overwhelmed parents to quickly up their internet savvy to ensure their digital safety.

“As we live through the first full lockdown week in Spain, the spike in online activity is no longer a surprise, it’s the new normal,” said Qustodio CEO and co-founder, **Eduardo Cruz**. “The coronavirus is propelling the whole world into a new era of connectedness. Busy parents, both during and after the crisis, will have to be extra careful not to let screen time take over their children’s lives and make sure they are protected from online predators and harmful content.”

In Spain’s first week of nation-wide school closings and lockdowns, online activity has surged 180%. In France, where the government closed schools on March 12th, online activity has increased 120%. In Italy, one of the first western nations to implement social distancing measures, online activity that had risen by 50% last week, has now risen to an incredible 220%.

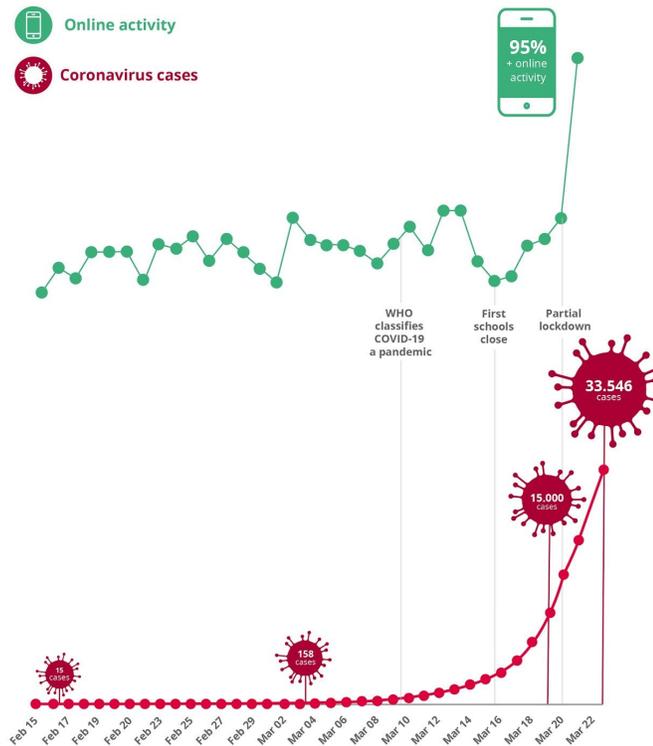


The spike in Spain is primarily happening because parents are being forced to both work at home, using newly installed VPNs and teleconferencing software such as zoom.us, and keep their children educated and entertained with little help beyond TVs and tablets. Leaving the kids with the grandparents, a common childcare solution in Spain, is not an option as it puts the grandparents at risk of infection. Older children are less likely to interrupt a conference call, but they are online more than ever, not just to play games and connect with friends but to attend e-classrooms and do group homework.

“Screens have become my child’s temporary grandparents,” said **Djanira Cortesao**, mother in Barcelona, where the government shut down schools a week ago. “My parents live nearby and help us out with childcare all year long. Like many of the close-knit families in Spain, we’ve hardly ever needed a babysitter. But during the COVID-19 lockdown, I much rather my daughter watch a few extra hours of videos than put my parents at risk of catching the coronavirus.”

In countries that took alternative or lighter approaches to social distancing in the beginning, they now show the same kind of acceleration in online activity after imposing stricter measures. In the U.S., where there is a partial lockdown and social distancing methods differ on regional level, Qustodio analysis shows a 95% increase in screen time since the first school closures in the nation on March 16. In the U.K., a country that had been taking a radically different approach to the spread of the coronavirus compared to the rest of Europe, online activity has increased 50% since some schools voluntarily closed on March 11. We expect both countries to spike and hit the 100% mark by the end of this week as UK schools go into full lockdown and as Covid-19 cases increase.

## Evolution of online activity in the U.S. in relation to COVID-19 cases



As online activity skyrockets, largely driven by increases in time spent playing games and on social media, children are being exposed to more dangers online, from loot boxes to online predators. Qustodio recommends parents speak to their kids about cyber safety, set up consistent time limits together, and to never hesitate to block any sites or apps they think are inappropriate. Parents should use both native and independent parental controls to help them.

“I do not recommend giving children extra screen time, but I understand that might not be realistic for many families in our current and unprecedented lockdown circumstances,” says **Maria Guerrero**, family psychologist and mother of two. “As long as their children are not connected all day long, I am telling stressed out parents to stay calm—to choose their battles and to worry more about creating consistent routines in regards to screen time and to ensure that the content their children are consuming is quality, age-appropriate, and above all, not harmful.”

We have put together the following guide to help parents avoid dangerous content.

### **Qustodio recommendations for parents looking to avoid dangerous online for their children during the coronavirus pandemic:**

- **Video games** - beware of loot boxes, known as a doorway to addictive or gambling-like behavior in kids, violent content, and open chat rooms. Check out [Common Sense Media](#), [ESRB](#), and [PEGI](#) for game ratings and age recommendations. Prevent in-app purchases and be sure to really get to know the game by playing together at least once. Remind your child to never give away personal information.
- **Social media** - beware of dangerous trending “challenges”, such as the [TikTok Skullbreaker](#) and remember social media is not recommended for children under 13. Remind children that anything they write or share, even temporary stories, are permanent. Remind them to never post something they might regret later or that could be used as blackmail.
- **Communication apps** - Be extra aware of who your children are talking to and remember that many gaming and social media apps also have ways to communicate or chat. As with social media, remind children that anything they write is permanent. Remind them to never post something they might regret later or that could be used as blackmail. And, as in the real world, tell them not to talk to strangers.
- **Educational apps and distance learning** - What better time to learn music, visit a virtual museum, improve your math and sciences skills, learn a new language or even work towards a degree. The world of online education and distance learning is exploding and this is a great time to take advantage of it. One caveat, some companies have been [accused of harvesting children's data without their parents' consent](#), be sure you understand who is collecting the data about your child and where it might end up.
- **Entertainment** - many of the big names in movies, videos, music and online entertainment are offering free access to their premium subscriptions right now. If you sign up, make sure the content is age appropriate and set yourself an alert to cancel the subscription if it is not something you want to have to pay for a month from now.
- **Porn & gambling** - as with entertainment apps the companies behind porn and gambling sites are offering [free content, many without requiring a](#)

[subscription](#). We recommend porn and gambling sites be blocked in any home with children or with people who have problems with addiction.

## **About Qustodio**

Created in 2012 in Barcelona, [Qustodio](#) is the leading platform for digital safety and [wellbeing](#) for families. Our parental control app with screen time limits, geolocation tracking, YouTube monitoring and advanced insights and reporting has over 2 million users worldwide in 180 countries. Qustodio works on different operating systems (Windows, Mac OS, Android, iOS and Kindle) and is available in 8 languages (English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, German, Japanese and simplified Chinese).

For more information: <https://www.qustodio.com>