



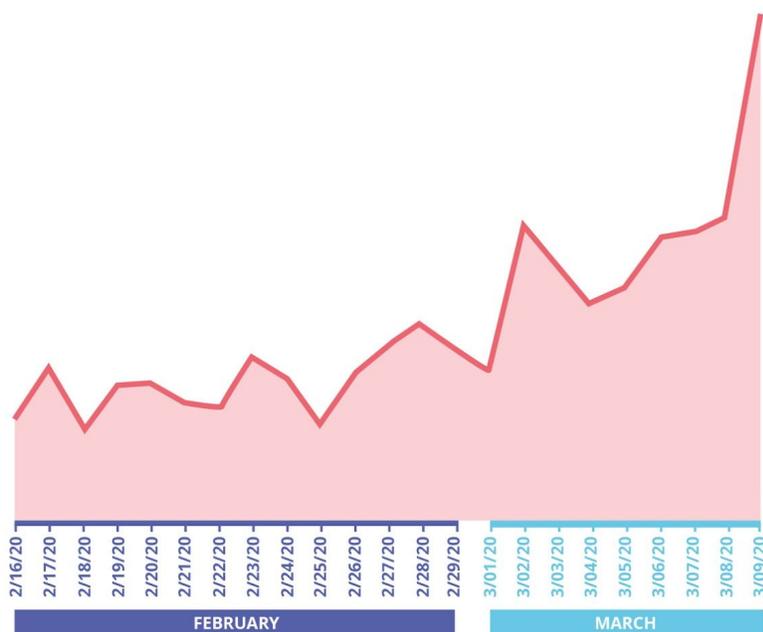
COVID-19 Lockdowns Causing Unprecedented Surge in Screen Time

Actions around the world to help control coronavirus pandemic radically increasing children's exposure online

March 13, 2020, New York – As countries around the world increasingly close schools and impose lockdowns and other measures to try to slow the spread of COVID-19, they are forcing millions of children indoors. In countries such as Italy, one of the first western nations to suffer from the coronavirus and to take action, **Qustodio's** analysis clearly shows an unprecedented surge in the amount of time children are spending behind screens in correlation with the outbreak.

Italy's first reported COVID-19 case was on February 20th. From that date to March 5th, the first day that schools and universities in Italy were closed to students on a national level, Qustodio research showed **visits to websites and time spent on apps skyrocketed by nearly 50%**. With the start of the country's lockdown this week, this trend showed an **alarming 71% increase compared to the start of the outbreak**.

Evolution of online accesses in Italy Feb 16 - March 9, 2020



“We all know today’s digital natives spend more time online than any other generation. And when they are at home on the weekends or during holidays, they tend to connect 20 to 30% more than on a typical school day,” said Qustodio CEO and co-founder, **Eduardo Cruz**. “That’s why we were so surprised and concerned that visits to web and time spent on apps were far exceeding, easily doubling that norm in Italy. That means Italian kids are living practically a 100% digital life online. With COVID-19 digital life balance is going out the window.”

This spike is primarily happening because parents are being forced to both work at home and take care of their children at the same time. Childcare is sparse and the common backup of leaving the kids with the grandparents puts the grandparents at risk of infection. “It’s literally a nightmare, I can’t get much work done,” said Elena Sala, mother of two in Madrid, Spain where the government

shut down schools this week. “With a 5 and an 7-year old now at home instead of in school, my husband and I are in survival mode. We have to admit right now we are relying on a steady stream of videos to keep our children entertained while we try to concentrate on work and keep things quiet during conference calls.”

Concerns around excess screen time are increasingly well documented. For example, a recent MRI study led by **Dr. John Hutton** at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital [linking higher screen use to lower measure of brain structure \(white matter\) and skills in preschool-aged kids](#). If the spike in screen time seen in Italy repeats in other countries following their lead, that exposure to additional content on the web or in apps, could harm children's physical and mental health on a global scale.

“Consistency is absolutely key when it comes to kids and screen time. If you change the rules now it is extremely difficult to go back to the way things were before,” advises **Maria Guerrero**, family psychologist. “Just as I tell parents not to give children extra screen time over the summer break, the same applies to the lockdown. Children are already going through confusing and major changes due to the coronavirus. Consistency in screen time rules will not only contribute to their digital safety and wellbeing, it will give them a sense of much needed normalcy.”

And it's not just about screen time. Parents also need to be aware of the kind of content their children are watching. Many companies are taking advantage of the crisis to supply free tools or content during the lockdown. Some, such as [Kahoot!](#) which is providing free distance learning benefit families. However, [PornHub](#) which has offered free access to its content to all users in Italy is potentially a big problem for families with kids.

Qustodio understands parents' hands are full at home during the COVID-19 lockdown, but we encourage them not to let their guard down when it comes to taking responsibility for helping their children watch appropriate content in the right amounts.

Recommendations to parents on how to achieve digital balance during the coronavirus pandemic:

- Need to keep the kids quiet during your next conference call? Try one of the many fantastic podcasts for kids instead of video.
- Not able to get outdoors? Exercise at home, a little yoga goes a long way.
- Turn off screens (yes, this includes TVs) 1 hour before bedtime to improve sleep quality and avoid blue light.
- Keep mobile phones off the dinner table. Resist the temptation of the 'digital pacifier'!
- Remember you are a role model. Put down your phone and make eye contact with your child. Their ability to socialize may depend on it!
- Set consistent screen time limits:
 - Avoid screen time for children under the age of 2. (Yes it's okay to wave hi to grandma online.)
 - Stick to one hour of screen time (max.) for children aged 2-5.
 - For older children base limits on your child's age and maturity or 'digital resilience'. Try not to make exceptions!
- Take 45 minute screen time breaks to protect eye health.
- Stay aware of what your children are watching. Try occasional co-watching and do your homework on video and game ratings, and stay aware of what dares are trending on social media. Don't hesitate to block any sites or apps you think are inappropriate.

About Qustodio

Created in 2012 in Barcelona, [Qustodio](https://www.qustodio.com) 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>