



CUSTODY & DIVORCE

## What Are Your Legal Rights During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak?

WRITTEN BY: HEATHER BLISS





Custody and Divorce: What Are Your Legal Rights During the  
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak?

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# What Are Your Legal Rights During the Coronavirus Outbreak?

How to Protect Your Children & Assets During a Pandemic

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The impact of Coronavirus in the United States has been swift and severe.

This has quickly affected the way we live, interact, shop and carry on with what seems to be our new “normal”. It has even impacted our court system – so much so that if you have a family law issue you may have some concerns.



At Bliss Law Group, you will find attorneys who are powerful advocates with the skills and experience to protect your rights and help you reach your legal goals in this difficult period.

We exist, first and foremost, to protect you and your family. Whether that means assisting with family law needs like divorce, modification of orders, or safeguarding your future, we strive to promote a positive and secure environment for families like yours.

Our firm understands that every divorce is unique. Our primary goal is to assist you in achieving the most beneficial outcome by means of alternative dispute resolution methods such as mediation or collaborative law. You can rest assured that our philosophy is balanced with a readiness to aggressively protect the rights and interests of you and your children should litigation become necessary.

Typically, alternative methods result in more mutually beneficial and

effective outcomes. If litigation becomes necessary, find comfort in knowing that Attorney Heather Z. Bliss and the entire team at Bliss Law Group will leverage every ounce of our extensive trial knowledge and experience on your behalf.

We understand these are troubled times and we want to be there for you, guiding you through actions necessary to protect yourself, your children and your assets. Through clear communication and strategy, we equip you with knowledge, empowering you to create your new future.

Right now, with the current panic over the Coronavirus, many clients are wondering how they should respond.

**We are fielding several questions and some examples are:**

- What if I don't trust my ex to make good decisions in protecting our children? For example, can my ex take our children on vacation during the Coronavirus Outbreak? Or can my ex take our children near other people during the Coronavirus Outbreak?
- What if the other parent is not letting me see my children during the outbreak, can we enforce the existing custody order? Am I required to follow the parenting plan during the Coronavirus Outbreak?
- My parenting plan is with someone out of state, due to a relocation. Do I have to follow the parenting plan which would require air travel?
- How do I get a divorce during the Coronavirus Outbreak? How has the process changed? And how can we move our parenting disputes forward despite the courts having delayed proceedings or only hearing emergency matters in certain counties?
- Is now the time to split up or should we delay our divorce? What risks would going forward pose to our children?



- How do I protect my assets during the Coronavirus Outbreak?

These are all very valid concerns in this unprecedented time. This is a time when even visits with extended family, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, can put children at risk and of course our older generation.

The Coronavirus Outbreak has led to delays in other court proceedings and some courts across the country have even closed. That is not the case in Washington State. You may be worried about how long your divorce is going to take and what you can expect, as the pandemic moves forward.



We are here to help guide you through this uncertain period. We want to help you preserve your dignity and protect what you value most.

We realize that even though many of us are staying home, life doesn't stop. There are concerns that must be dealt with and the welfare of children must be protected.

We are known for handling each contact and case with the utmost urgency and empathy. Our attorneys will address your legal issues and help you avoid the stress that can come with uncertainty about your divorce, your children or other important legal matters.

We created this guide to help you more easily get the answers you need to the Coronavirus Outbreak and its effects on divorce and child custody cases. You are going to learn what steps you can take to protect your family and your assets and how you can continue moving your divorce forward.

# Facts About Coronavirus

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## What is Coronavirus?

Coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a newly identified type of virus that has caused a recent outbreak of respiratory illnesses. Coronavirus was first discovered in December of 2019 in Wuhan, China.

## What does COVID-19 stand for?

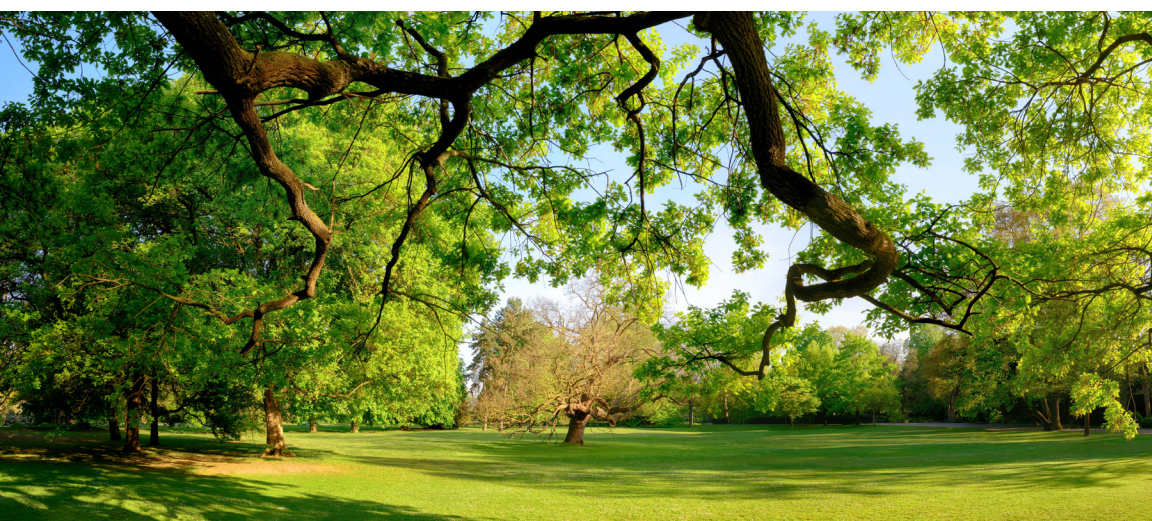
The 'CO' stands for 'corona,' the 'VI' stands for 'virus,' and the 'D' stands for disease. This disease was formerly known as the "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV". Now it is widely called COVID-19. There are actually many types of human coronaviruses in existence, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses.

## What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

People with Coronavirus may experience: tiredness, a dry cough, fever and difficulty breathing (severe cases).

## Who is affected by Coronavirus?

Anyone can catch Coronavirus but elderly individuals who struggled with previous health issues like hypertension are particularly at risk.





## How does Coronavirus compare to the flu?

The CDC estimates that 38 million Americans were infected with the flu this season, which led to over 23,000 deaths. In comparison, the Coronavirus has produced 336,906 cases so far with 9,624 deaths. Those numbers are expected to continue rising.

In fact, Tom Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the US just recently said as much. When asked about the Coronavirus pandemic, he said flatly: “it’s going to get worse.”

Most experts believe it is going to get a lot worse before it begins to get better. That means many things could be impacted even more than it has already been. There will definitely be more uncertainty.

Bliss Law Group is here to help!

## How can I stay safe from the Coronavirus?

Health experts recommend that you do the following things to lessen your chances of contracting the Coronavirus (COVID-19):

- Stay home as much as you can
- Practice social distancing – maintain a safe distance from others (6 feet minimum)
- Wash your hands frequently – wash for 20 seconds with soap and water or an alcohol-based rub
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing
- Stay home and self isolate from others in the household if you feel sick
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

## Coronavirus Child Custody & Divorce Tips

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Now without further ado, let's dive into our prescription for those seeking a divorce during this challenging period of time.

Utilize the following tips to prevent unpleasant surprises and keep your divorce moving forward – and your children protected – during the Coronavirus Outbreak.

### Tip #1 – Carefully consider each parenting action that you take

The simple truth is how you act now during the Coronavirus Outbreak, will highly impact if the court sees you as a responsible co-parent in the future.



That means if you have an existing custody order, you must, by all means possible, continue to follow it. Please keep in mind that failing to follow the order and withholding custody could lead to negative consequences in the future.

In fact, many states (including California, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts) have already ruled that visitation is an essential function that should continue even when shelter-in-place orders have been issued.



So again, if you have an existing custody order you must make a diligent and good faith effort to follow it. If you decide you can't follow the order due to the Coronavirus, you should take detailed notes. Write down exactly what happened and why and then be sure to keep those notes in a secure location that you can easily access. You should also strongly consider offering make-up time for the time that was withheld.

If your spouse isn't letting you see your children, don't try to immediately involve the authorities to enforce visitation rights. Talk to an attorney first to see if he or she can help you resolve the situation. If you do not have a custody order, you should talk to an attorney about your parenting rights.

## **Tip #2 – Articulate your concerns to the other party**

Many issues that arise during a divorce are caused by a lack of communication about each party's expectations. Communication is critical, in order to see if each other's expectations can be reasonably met.

Depending on how acrimonious the split, it may be difficult to try to talk to a former partner but remember this if for the sake of the children.

In difficult times like this we need to set aside disagreements and work together to keep family safe. If at all possible, talk to your ex and try to come to an agreement on what the children will and won't be allowed to do.

In most areas of the country right now, it is recommended that children stay home. They shouldn't be outside playing with other children. They shouldn't be visiting family members. They should remain in the safety of their homes.

If you and your ex are not able to come to an agreement, our attorneys are highly skilled and experienced in divorce dispute resolution and may be able to help you come to an agreement with your ex spouse or partner.

### Tip #3 – Consider mediation as a way to resolve disputes

Mediation is a process where you (with your attorney) and your spouse (with his/her attorney) meet with a neutral trained party (known as a “mediator”) who doesn’t know either of you and doesn’t know anything about your case. Their goal is to help you and your spouse reach an agreement, regarding the issues involved in the dispute.

You may be in the same room with your spouse or you and your spouse may be in separate rooms throughout the mediation process. Successful mediations have also taken place via Zoom conferencing calls, which allow mediations to be held, even if all parties aren’t in the same location.

If you and your spouse are able to reach an agreement in mediation, the agreement is written down and signed by both of you. This is then filed in the courts as a CR2A agreement and is enforceable.

We have found that it’s possible to use mediation for many disputes, even in high conflict situations.

Mediation also has other benefits during the Coronavirus Outbreak. For one, mediations can be held regardless of what is happening





at the courthouse, which means you may be able to get a faster resolution to the issue.

Another benefit of mediation is that it may be a better option for maintaining privacy compared to hearings that are live streamed online.

#### **Tip #4 - Talk to a lawyer about putting protections in place for your children**

If you are seriously concerned about the welfare of your children, don't just ignore your worries. Contact us to see what types of legal protections can be put into place to help ensure the safety of your children and to ensure you are not in violation of a court order.

For instance, we could help you obtain a restraining order and petition the court to make changes or modifications in custody or visitation agreements in order to keep your children safe.

Most people have never gone through anything like this before. So if you find yourself in an uncertain circumstance and you want to protect yourself and your children, one of the very first things you should do is talk to an attorney as soon as possible.

Talking to an attorney can provide you with knowledgeable insight and advice about what to do in your unique circumstances. The ideal attorney is honest with you about your case, and cares about your goals for you and your family. They are there to help you stay focused on what is important and will eliminate a lot of the confusion and stress people experience with divorce and family law matters.

In divorce and family law issues, emotions generally run high and with the added stress of the Coronavirus, the accompanying court restrictions and possible delays can be very complicated at any time, and even more so today.

Talking to a competent and experienced attorney, such as Attorney Heather Z. Bliss or any experienced attorney at Bliss Law Group, can save you a great deal of frustration as well as time and money.

## Tip #5 – Take advantage of technology

One way to move your divorce or child custody case forward despite the Coronavirus Outbreak, is to take advantage of modern technology – such as video conferencing and live streaming.

You can even meet with attorneys and conduct mediations online through video conferencing technology. Contact Bliss Law Group to learn more about what technology you may be able to take advantage of in your particular area.

## Tip #6 – Talk to an attorney about protecting your assets if you are facing a divorce

The Coronavirus Pandemic that is sweeping across the country (and the globe) isn't just affecting health; it is also causing a tremendous loss of wealth.



Concerns about the Coronavirus have sent the markets – and individuals' 401K's – spiraling downward; as an example, reports indicate that Amazon owner Jeff Bezos lost \$7 billion in one night, Elon Musk lost \$4 billion, and regular investors have lost thousands.

Plus, businesses, like restaurants and bars, are being told to close. Many people have lost their jobs and are busy worrying about how they are going to pay their monthly bills.

The Coronavirus Outbreak may be affecting your assets and you may need to talk

to an expert, in order to decide your best strategy in protecting the value of those assets during the pandemic. An asset protection strategy is something that needs to be put into place without delay.

For instance, you could be concerned about retirement assets, savings accounts, real estate investments, stock portfolios, and more. Discussing these important issues with an attorney could help you decide whether to proceed with a divorce or take other steps to help protect the value of these important assets.

At Bliss Law Group, we will work hard to answer your questions and we can also help you connect with highly qualified financial and wealth management advisers, business consultants and other vetted vendors to assist you with any financial issues that you may be facing.





## The Bottom Line

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Whether you are looking for a simple uncontested divorce or are facing complex issues including the division of assets and liabilities, child custody and support or the division of business interests, the support and advice of a highly skilled attorney will make things much easier.

Many married couples have complex financial assets to untangle, including real property, business investments, retirement assets, and other joint assets. Debts will also need to be addressed and divided accordingly.

Perhaps the most complex of all situations is when the couple that is facing divorce or separation also involves children. In these cases, it is necessary to establish custody, visitation agreements, school placement, and child support.



Now add on top of all these complex issues the Coronavirus Outbreak, which is causing possible court delays, loss of wealth and serious health concerns, and the need for an experienced divorce attorney becomes exponentially higher.

At Bliss Law Group, we can help you navigate the complexities of divorce law during this unprecedented time in American history. We will:

- Work closely with you to ensure your needs are met and your concerns addressed
- Rely on our extensive experience in the areas of divorce law and child custody to help move you in the right direction
- Diligently strive to protect your rights and preserve your dignity

When you seek our help, you can expect straight talk and honest advice. The team at Bliss Law Group takes a practical, smart, and common sense approach to handling divorce and family law matters.

The attorneys at Bliss Law Group will explain everything you need to know, in order for you to make informed decisions, always let you know where you stand, fight aggressively to protect your legal rights and pursue your objectives. Fully understanding that divorce is an emotional time, they will treat you with the compassion and respect you deserve.

Bliss Law Group also doesn't rest on its considerable laurels either. We are constantly evolving and growing, and you can count on us to not just have your best legal interest in mind, but also your safety during the Coronavirus Outbreak.

We will take advantage of the latest technological advances to make it as easy and safe for you to consult with your attorney and move your divorce or family law issue forward.

CHAPTER FOUR

## Your Next Step

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The key to weathering any storm is to first get informed so that you can take the best action, moving forward.

Contact us today to schedule your goals and strategy session, and to learn much more about how we can help you with your divorce and child custody issues.

The goal in any divorce proceeding is to dissolve the marriage, while placing the least amount of financial and emotional stress on all the parties involved.

An experienced divorce lawyer can help this happen smoothly and with a minimal amount of disagreements and lingering bitterness.

We will also help you mediate disputed items and while keeping you fully informed and aware of your legal rights, throughout the entire divorce proceeding.

Right now, the Coronavirus is having a significant impact on the way things are proceeding – including divorces and child custody agreements.

Don't risk making mistakes or enduring unnecessary, costly delays – talk to an Attorney at Bliss Law Group by calling [253-844-4412](tel:253-844-4412) or emailing [hello@blisslaw-group.com](mailto:hello@blisslaw-group.com).

Don't worry, appointments can be completed by phone or video call – in person interaction is not necessary. We offer same day and evening appointments, via phone or Zoom.

**Get the legal advice you need to take the right next steps in protecting your future!**





# CONTACT US

PHONE

**(253) 844-4412**

EMAIL

**[hello@blisslaw-group.com](mailto:hello@blisslaw-group.com)**

WEBSITE

**[www.blisslaw-group.com](http://www.blisslaw-group.com)**