

Let's Talk About...

COVID-19: Back to school safely

Why is going back to school important?

School is an important part of your child's learning and development. In addition to reading, writing, and math, kids also learn valuable social and emotional skills. Schools are a place for kids to access the internet for learning and get a healthy midday meal. They also provide safe, supportive, and supervised spaces for children while parents and caretakers are at work.

Because of these reasons, many schools are working to safely reopen during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Is it safe to send my child to school?

There isn't a simple "yes" or "no" answer to this question.

Because coronavirus spreads from person-to-person contact, there is a chance that your child could get or spread the virus while at school. There are ways to lower the chances of getting COVID-19; however, it's up to you as the parent or caretaker to understand the risks and to decide if the benefits of in-person schooling are greater than the risks.

Risk is the possibility that something will go wrong. **Use the table at the right to help identify some areas of risk for your family.** If you have several answers in the "Higher Risk" column, you may want to consider homeschool until the risks improve or can be better managed.

What do I need to do next?

Prepare your child or adolescent to go back to school safely by reinforcing these 4 key behaviors:

- 1 Wear a mask while in school and around others.
- 2 Keep 6 feet away from others if possible.
- 3 Wash hands often.
- 4 Stay home when sick. Keep your child home if they have a fever of 100.4° F (38.0° C) or higher, or have any symptoms of COVID-19 (see last page).

Risk Assessment	Lower Risk	Higher Risk
Community-based Risks		
Is your community experiencing a high number of cases or a surge in cases?	No	Yes
Are people in your community wearing masks in public?	Yes	No
Do you and your family members wear masks in public places?	Yes	No
Is your family following social distancing guidelines when around others?	Yes	No
School-based Risks		
Is everyone required to wear masks or face coverings while in school?	Yes	No
Are students able to physically distance while in school? (Desks spaced 6 ft apart, smaller class sizes, staggered recess and lunch times)?	Yes	No
Does your child stay with the same group of students all day?	Yes	No
Does your child's school have high enrollment or larger class sizes?	No	Yes
Home-based Risks		
Is your child able to comfortably wear a mask or face covering?	Yes	No
Is your child generally in good health?	Yes	No
Do you have several school-aged children in your family?	No	Yes
Is anyone in the household at high-risk for health complications?	No	Yes
Do you rely on others to help care for your child (such as grandparents)?	No	Yes
Can you work from home or take time-off if your child becomes sick?	Yes	No

What happens if someone gets sick?

To date, school-aged children and adolescents are less likely to have symptoms or become seriously ill from COVID-19. While this is good for children, it's important to remember:

- **Children with COVID-19 can become very ill.** In addition to possible flu-like symptoms, some children get MIS-C or Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children. This is a new and serious health condition related to COVID-19.
- **Children with COVID-19 can unknowingly spread the infection** to parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, and others.

What is "close contact?"

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers close contact to mean that you are within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes.

If someone in close contact with your child becomes sick with COVID-19, your child will have to **quarantine for up to 14 days**. In some situations, children in quarantine may continue to attend school.

If your child has a confirmed case of COVID-19, they will have to stay home and **isolate from others for at least 14 days**.

Also, anyone in close contact with your child (such as you, siblings, caretakers, or others at their school) will also have to quarantine. The quarantine time is based on the last contact with the person while they were sick. As a parent caring for a child with COVID-19, this could mean having to **quarantine for 3 to 4 weeks or longer**.

Can schools close?

If too many people become sick with COVID-19 at the same time, your child's class or school may have to close for in-person teaching.

How can I keep my child and family safe?

Wear a mask. Wearing a mask is the simplest and most effective way to stop the spread of coronavirus. Combining mask-wearing with physical distancing and good handwashing practices will help protect the people around your child and helps ensure that schools remains open.

While the topic of mask-wearing can be a sensitive subject, more and more research shows that wearing a mask prevents the spread of COVID-19. To be effective, all students, teachers, staff, and visitors need to wear masks while at school.

How can I help my child wear a mask?

Wearing a mask may be a new experience for your child. Here are some tips to help your child adjust:

- Explain the need for mask wearing in age-appropriate terms to your child.
- Make mask wearing fun. Let your child participate in choosing, making, or decorating their mask.
- Let your child see you wear your own mask.
- Maintain a positive attitude around mask-wearing.
- Make sure the mask fits well. It should cover the nose and mouth and not be too loose or tight.
- Have extra masks available just in case the mask becomes lost or dirty. Remember to wash the mask after each day's use.

What if my child is scared of wearing a mask?

If your child is nervous about wearing a mask or face covering, scan this QR code for suggestions from the American Academy of Pediatrics ([healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)) on how to help your child.



Are masks safe to wear all day?

Yes, masks are safe to wear. Masks do not lower your ability to breathe in air (oxygen) or breathe out carbon dioxide (CO₂). These molecules easily pass through masks. Healthcare providers have worn masks for years, often for long stretches of time, without any problems.

How do masks work?

When we breathe, speak, cough, or sneeze, small droplets of fluid leave our mouth and nose. These droplets carry the COVID-19 virus away from the body. Masks help trap these droplets or prevent them from traveling as far as they would otherwise. With less virus in the air or environment, you are less likely to become infected or spread the infection.

Are there students who shouldn't wear masks?

Children younger than 2 should not wear masks.

Are there medical exemptions for children to not wear masks?

Medical exemptions for mask-wearing are rare.

Medical exemptions are sometimes given to children with special healthcare needs, such as those with autism or other severe developmental, thinking, or breathing problems.

These children are often more vulnerable to serious health problems. It's important that others around them wear a mask to help protect them from getting COVID-19.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your child's doctor if they have any symptoms of COVID-19, including:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38.0° C) or higher
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Symptoms can range from mild to severe and appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus.

Get emergency medical care immediately if your child has:

- Trouble breathing
- Bluish coloring around the lips and face
- Ongoing pressure or pain in the chest
- Signs of confusion
- Trouble waking up or staying awake

Questions for my doctor

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