

BACK TO SCHOOL SAFELY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Schools across the country have carefully weighed the risks and benefits of reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic and many schools have decided to reopen for in-person learning. We know that many parents are understandably concerned about the safety of their children at school. Here we provide answers to some of those questions based on the latest medical evidence.

What are the BENEFITS of going back to school?

Schools provide more than just academics to children and adolescents. In addition to reading, writing and math, children learn social and emotional skills, get exercise and access to mental health support and other things that cannot be provided with online learning. For many families, school is where kids get healthy meals, access to the internet, and other vital services.

What are the RISKS of going back to school?

The best available evidence so far suggests that children and adolescents are less likely to have symptoms or severe disease from infection (AAP statement 7/10/2020) and that COVID-19 transmission among children in schools may be low. Some children with COVID-19 can become severely ill, but this is rare, and appears to be much less common than with the influenza

we see every year. It's important to note that infected children may not have symptoms but can still spread the infection to those around them, including parents, grandparents, teachers, neighbors, and others. So, in order to reduce the risk for everyone, you'll need to take safety measures seriously at all times, even when your child feels perfectly fine.

How can you LOWER the risk and keep SAFE?

Although there is no way to eliminate the risk of getting COVID-19, there are effective ways to lower the chances of infection and protect children and the people around them to ensure schools remain open. Those key behaviors for everyone, including children, include wearing a mask while in school and around others, washing hands often, keeping 6 feet away from others if possible, and staying home when sick (see symptoms on page 3).

WEAR A MASK

Wearing a mask is the simplest and most effective way to stop the spread of coronavirus. When we breathe, speak, cough or sneeze, masks help trap the droplets from our mouth and nose and prevent these droplets from traveling as far as they normally would. That means there is less virus in the air, which means there is less risk of becoming infected or infecting others.

To be effective, all children need to wear masks. Having children in school who are not masked is a risk for teachers, other adults in the school and other children. Non-masked children can also increase community spread of COVID-19 potentially to the home setting to parents and grandparents.

Is it safe to wear a mask all day?

Yes. Surgical or cloth masks do not limit your ability to breathe in oxygen or exhale carbon dioxide. Remember, health care providers wear these masks all day without any problems.

Are there students who shouldn't wear masks?

Medical exemptions for mask-wearing are rare, but sometimes given to children with special health care needs.

What if my child doesn't want to wear a face covering?

It's understandable that children may be resistant to or afraid of cloth face coverings at first. Here are a few ideas to help them feel more comfortable:

- Explain the need for mask wearing in age-appropriate terms to your child.
- Let your child see you wear your own mask and have a positive attitude about wearing a mask.
- Look in the mirror with the face coverings on and talk about it.

- Frame wearing a mask as a life skill, just like getting dressed and brushing teeth.
- Practice wearing the face covering and help your child get used to it.
- Put a cloth face covering on a favorite stuffed animal.
- Decorate them so they're more personalized and fun.
- Show your child pictures of other children wearing them.
- Draw one on their favorite book character.

Adapted from [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)

How do I properly wear and care for a mask?

- Make sure the mask fits well. It should cover the nose and mouth and not be too loose or tight.
- Have extra masks available—at home and school—just in case the mask becomes lost or dirty.
- Remind your child to try not to touch the mask throughout the day.
- Remember to wash the mask after each day's use in hot water.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COVID-19

What if my child is exposed to someone who has COVID-19?

Your child will have to quarantine for 14 days from the last contact with the COVID-19 positive person.

What if my child feels a little sick? Should they stay home?

Parents with a sick child are encouraged to contact their primary care provider to seek advice about whether to send a child to school or not.

What if my child has a confirmed case of COVID-19?

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 have to quarantine. Your health care provider or the Department of Health will help with this.

Sources: University of Utah Department of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org

When should I call my doctor if I'm worried my child might have COVID-19?

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

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