Making Decisions about Children Attending In-person School During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Information for Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers

Updated Jan 19, 2021

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[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/decision-tool.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/decision-tool.html)l

Many parents, caregivers, and guardians face new and difficult choices about how their child will return to school in the fall, such as deciding between in-person and virtual learning.

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This tool is designed to help parents, caregivers, and guardians weigh the risks and benefits of available educational options to help them make decisions about sending their child back to school. It is organized to provide parents and caregivers with:

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• Information on COVID-19 and why safely reopening schools is so critical.

• Tools to:

\_ Help you assess your child’s and your family’s risk of COVID-19;

\_ Consider factors that will help you make a choice, if offered, of instructional format (e.g. virtual, in person, or a hybrid option); and

\_ Prepare for the school year, regardless of format.

## Introduction

## It is critical for schools to open as safely and as quickly as possible for in-person learning. Schools play an important role in children’s educational achievement, health, and wellbeing. Working with state, tribal, local, and territorial health officials, schools can also play an important role in slowing the spread of COVID-19 while ensuring that children have a safe and healthy learning environment.

## As a parent, guardian, or caregiver, you may have the option to choose between in-person, virtual, or a hybrid mode of learning for your child(ren). You can review your school or school district’s plans to understand the steps they are taking to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to support your child’s education. See CDC’s Considerations for Schools to learn more about potential strategies schools may implement to slow the spread of COVID-19. Your choice of learning format may be based on whether your child or a household member is at increased risk of severe illness, how many cases of COVID-19 are in your community, your child’s academic and social-emotional needs, and your family’s or household’s needs. Schools provide important services and support for children’s academic, social-emotional, and physical health. The benefits of in-person learning and services should be weighed against the risks of COVID-19 for your child and your household.

## Information on the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, including among children, is available from CDC’s COVID Data Tracker. For more information on COVID-19 and Children visit Children, Teens, and Young Adults.

## Household members and COVID-19

## It is important to understand how to avoid getting sick when any household member participates in in-person activities, including in-person learning. Because children can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to others, parents, guardians, and caregivers should consider whether their child(ren) or other household members are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 when making decisions about in-person school and other activities. If a household includes someone who is at increased risk for severe illness, then all household members should act as if they, themselves, are at increased risk.

## If your child or a member of your family has been diagnosed with COVID-19, please follow CDC’s guidelines and stay at home until the criteria to discontinue home isolation have been met.

## Household and community risks for COVID-19

## You can fill out this chart to determine the risk for your child, members of your household, and your child’s caregivers. If you select “Yes” for #1 or #2, your child might be at increased risk for getting COVID-19 by participating in in-person school. If you select “Yes” for #3 or #4, your child or household member might be more likely to develop severe illness from COVID-19. If you select “Yes” for any items, you may want to consider virtual/at-home learning options for your child. If you select “Don’t Know,” consider binding out the answers by looking at your local health department webpage and CDC webpages, or consulting with your household members’ healthcare providers. [[\*sk1\*]]

## Household Risk Checklist

## In print, a table format is presented with each item followed by three blank entries with the following column headings: Yes, No, Don’t Know. In this version, the table format and blank columns are omitted.

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1. The level of COVID-19 in my child(ren)’s school is moderate to high, based on the information provided by the school or health department.1

2. The level of COVID-19 in my community is moderate to high based on the number of new cases (20 per 100,000 persons or more) or percent positive tests (5% or higher) reported by my local health department in the past 14 days.2

3. My child has an underlying condition that increases their risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

4. Someone who lives in the household with my child or who cares for my child is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

1 Contact your school district or health department for more information.

2 See CDC’s Indicators and Thresholds for Schools for more information.

## Decision-making tool for parents and guardians

Choosing whether or not to send your child back to school can be difficult. When weighing decisions about your child returning to school, it is important to consider your family’s unique needs and situation and your comfort level with the steps your school is taking to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some considerations may include the specific risks to members of your household if a child were to become infected in school, as well as access to school meal programs, social services, extended day childcare services and extra-curricular activities, social-emotional support from peers and educators, and school transportation.

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The questions in these tools are designed to help you weigh the risks and benefits of available educational options before you make decisions. Recognizing that there may be many unknowns, answer each question with a check in the column that most closely reflects you and your family today. When you are finished, review your answers. Remember, each family is different so certain questions may be particularly important to you. Multiple checks in the “Unsure” or “Disagree” columns might warrant a conversation with school administrators, your healthcare provider, or your employer. Parents may also want to use the tool to make their views, concerns, and suggestions known to school administrators.

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## Back to In-Person Learning

You can use this checklist to consider and prepare for in-person learning. If you select “Yes” for most items, you may want to consider in-person learning for your child. If you select “No” or “Unsure” for any item, consider working with your school to address any potential questions or concerns. See CDC’s Considerations for Operating Schools during the COVID-19 pandemic to learn more about potential strategies schools may implement to slow the spread of COVID-19.

In print, a table format is presented with each item followed by four blank entries with the following column headings: Yes, No, Unsure and Not Applicable. In this version, the table format and blank columns are omitted.

In-Person Learning Checklist[[\*sk1\*]]

I am aware of my school’s plans for in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I feel comfortable with my school’s reopening plans for reducing risk of spreading COVID-19.

I believe my school has the resources needed to effectively implement their reopening plan (e.g., staffing, supplies, training).

I feel comfortable with my school’s plan if a student or sta􀀁 member has symptoms or tests positive for the virus that causes COVID-19.

I am satisfied with how my school communicates with families about the changes to the school’s COVID-19 plan.

I am satisfied with how my school is addressing parents’ or caregivers’ concerns and questions.

My child knows how to properly wear a cloth face covering and understands the importance of doing so.

My child can wear a mask for an extended period of time.

My child can follow instructions and stay at least 6 feet away from other people in the classroom, while waiting for the school bus, and in other settings.

My child has a reliable mode of transportation to and from school (e.g., school bus, carpool, walk/bike, public transit).

I am comfortable with how my child’s mode of transportation to and from school is reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19 (e.g., decreased bus/transit capacity, wearing masks, increased cleaning and disinfecting practices).

## Virtual/at-home learning

You can use this checklist to consider and prepare for virtual or at-home learning. If you select “Yes” for most items, you may want to consider virtual/at-home learning for your child. If you select “No” or “Unsure” for any item, consider working with your school or others to address any potential questions or concerns.

In print, a table format is presented with each item followed by four blank entries with the following column headings: Yes, No, Unsure and Not Applicable. In this version, the table format and blank columns are omitted.

Virtual/At-Home Learning Checklist [[\*sk1\*]]

I am able to work while my child is learning at home (i.e., I can still successfully do my job, I am able to telework).

I have access to reliable internet and a device, such as a computer or tablet, which my child can use for virtual learning. [Contact your school to inquire if they provide support (e.g., hotspots, computers), if needed].

I can supervise or identify someone who can supervise my child during periods of virtual/at home learning.

My child has a designated space for learning at home that has few distractions during school hours.1

My school provides a virtual learning option that meets the learning needs of my student.

My child’s learning style and needs are compatible with virtual modes of learning.

My child is/was able to keep up academically through virtual/at-home learning.

My child will receive quality education through virtual/at-home learning.

My child will be sufficiently engaged during prolonged periods of virtual/at-home learning.

My child will be able to stay socially connected during prolonged periods of virtual/at-home learning.

If my child needs specialized adaptive communication devices, equipment, or learning aides, I can access them where I live, or I have access to them through my school.

1 21st Century Community Learning Centers are community learning centers that provide academic enrichment opportunities, which may be an alternative learning space for your child. Contact your state education agency for more information.

## School-based services

You can use this checklist to consider whether your child and your family will be able to access school-based services you may be using. If you select “Yes” for most items, you may want to consider virtual/at-home learning for your child. If you select “No” or “Unsure” for any item, consider whether you would prefer to receive these services in school. If your child is at higher risk for severe illness and relies on school-based services that are only available on site, you may want to have additional conversations with your school to address concerns you may have.

In print, a table format is presented with each item followed by four blank entries with the following column headings: Yes, No, Unsure and Not Applicable. In this version, the table format and blank columns are omitted.

School-Based Services Checklist

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If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or other specialized learning or behavior plan…

My child is able to receive the required IEP learning accommodations through a virtual/at-home learning option that meets my family’s needs.

If your child receives school-based learning services (e.g., tutoring before or after school) …

My child is able to receive needed school-based learning services through a virtual/at-home learning option that meets my family’s needs.

If your child receives school-based nutrition services (e.g., school breakfast or lunch) …

My child has an alternative to the nutrition services provided in schools that adequately meets our family’s needs [Your school district’s child nutrition website may have this information].1

If your child receives school-based behavioral services (e.g., social skills training, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy) …

My child is able to receive needed behavioral services through a virtual/at-home option that meets my family’s needs.

If your child receives school-based emotional or mental health services…

My child is able to receive needed emotional or mental health services through a virtual/at-home option that meets my family’s needs.

If your child attends after care (including after school clubs and activities) provided by the school…

My child has an alternative to the after-care services provided by schools that adequately meets my family’s needs.

1 School meals in some states may still be available to parents with kids for children learning from home, although this may be subject to change. Learn about parent meal pick-up options here: [[\*:\*]]<https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>[[\*;\*]]

# References

1. Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Children — United States, February 12–April 2, 2020. *Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2020;69:422–426.

2. CDC COVID Data Tracker. Available at [[\*:\*]]https://www.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/. Accessed on July 21, 2020.[[\*;\*]]

3. Feldstein LR, Rose EB, Horwitz SM, Collins JP, Newhams MM, Son MB, Newburger JW, Kleinman LC, Heidemann SM, Martin AA, Singh AR. Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in US Children and Adolescents [published online ahead of print June 29, 2020]. *New Eng J Med*. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa2021680

4. Rajmil L. Role of children in the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic: a rapid scoping review. BMJ Paediatr Open. 2020;4:e000722.

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Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases