

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents: Return to school During COVID-19

Leaders in the pediatric community have been working closely with school district leaders to develop guidance to schools reopen safely. Here are some answers to common questions parents may have about their children returning to school in person.

When will it be safe to return to school in person?

The best decisions regarding the opening of in-person school are based on infection rates in your community and are made with public health experts, educators, school leaders and parents working together. The State of Arizona released guidelines based on the numbers of COVID-19 infections in Arizona. Local health departments and school districts will use these numbers to make decisions about when it is safe to return to school in person. In the meantime, school may start online until it is safe to go back in person. Depending on infection rates, there may be a need to switch back and forth between online and in person (traditional) or a combination (hybrid) school throughout the school year.

Why should students go to school in person when it is safe?

Research shows that children learn best when they are physically present in the classroom. In addition, children learn social and emotional skills, get exercise, and receive extra learning support that is not available online. For many families, school is where children get access to healthy meals and the internet.

What will schools do to prevent the spread of COVID?

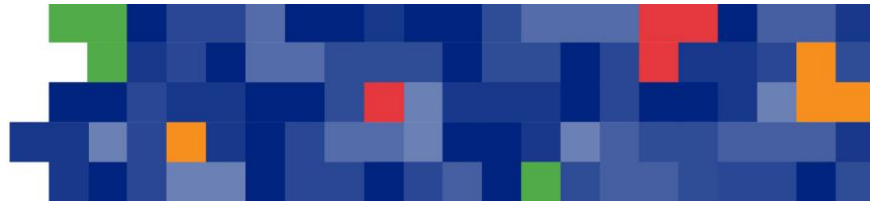
Three key things: Schools will ask that children and school staff wear cloth face masks, keep their hands clean with washing or hand sanitizers, and practice social distancing with a goal to stay 6 feet apart when possible. The number of these practices needed may vary based on state infection numbers.

Class size and teachers: Schools will also try to keep smaller group of children together in classes (cohort) and have the teachers move from classroom to classroom to limit the number of children in the hallways at one time. When possible, children will have the same teacher all day. Some learning may be moved outside.

Lunch may be at their desk or outside in small groups rather than in a lunchroom.

Cleaning and Screening: Schools should follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for cleaning classrooms and common areas. The school may ask you to screen your child for symptoms of COVID-19 and take their temperature before sending them to school.

Transportation: Schools will space seating on buses and ask children and drivers to wear face masks while on the bus. They may also stagger drop-off times and areas at the school.



As a parent, how can I help ensure a safe in-person learning environment?

- Ensure you have a medical office or provider to call if you or someone in your family becomes ill. [provide recommendations/resources]
- If your child is ill, keep them out of school. Have a back-up plan for when this occurs.
- If your child is diagnosed with a spreadable illness, report it to the school immediately. Others may need to be notified.
- Educate and enforce physical distancing, hand hygiene, and masking with your children and family whenever you are outside your home. Stay up to date on public health recommendations.

How can I keep my family healthy and manage stress during this difficult time?

Eat as healthy as possible; exercise and get outside, especially when it gets cooler; connect with others as much and as safely as possible; get enough sleep; and make sure you and your children have all your vaccines up to date.

Continue to practice CDC guidelines of wearing a cloth face mask in public, washing your hands, practicing social distancing and staying home when you are sick.

Key questions you might want to ask your school leaders:

- What is your plan for children with disabilities? Or children with high-risk health problems?
- How can my child get access to a computer if we don't have one? Do we have to have a webcam?
- What if I must work and school is closed?
- Do you have plans for emotional and behavioral health support for in-person school or when school is online?
- Do you provide school meals if the school is closed?
- What is the plan for sports?
- What happens when someone or my child gets a fever or symptoms at school?
- Do you have a plan for investigating and testing if my child is exposed?
- How will you inform families if a student or teacher tests positive?

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics-Return to School with COVID-19

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx>

State of Arizona- Return to School Resources

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-safely-return-to-in-person-instruction.pdf>