



COVID-19

Know What to Expect at Your Child's K-12 School or Early Care and Education Program

Updated Nov. 10, 2021

COVID-19 outbreaks can happen in schools and early care and education (ECE) programs, but CDC understands the importance of in-person learning. Based on studies from the previous school year, we know that using multiple prevention strategies can keep children, teachers, and staff safe and keep schools and ECE programs open.

Things Your Child's School or Early Care and Education Program May Consider

When making decisions about how to keep students and staff safe, school and ECE program administrators should consider:

- [How many cases of COVID-19](#) are in your community.
- The number of people [vaccinated in your community](#).
- Ability of the local health care system to care for new patients.
- Ages of children in the school or ECE program.



As the situation in your community changes, school and ECE program administrators may change policies.

Layered Prevention Strategies

Your child's school or ECE may **layer prevention** measures in the classroom or during other activities, meaning they may use many prevention measures at the same time. Using layered prevention measures is important when some prevention measures cannot be used. For example, when people are not able to physically distance from each other, using other prevention strategies, like masking and ventilation, can still help stop the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccines

Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent getting very sick with COVID-19. [Everyone 5 years and older is now eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.](#) Learn more about [COVID-19 vaccines for children and teens](#).

Find a COVID-19 vaccine: Search [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), text your ZIP code to 438829, or call 1-800-232-0233 to find locations near you.

Your child's school or ECE program may provide information to families about how to get vaccinated. They may also offer flexible options for excused absences to allow students time to get vaccinated and stay home if they have [side effects after vaccinations](#).

Masks

When teachers, staff, and children [wear a mask](#), they protect others as well as themselves.

- Given new evidence on the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking in schools and ECE programs for ages 2 years and older and other strategies to prevent spread of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status.
- [Children under 2 years of age](#) should not wear a mask.
- Masks are required on **all public transportation, including school buses**. Regardless of the mask policy at school, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses operated by public or private school systems. [Learn more](#).

Physical distancing and cohorting

Your child's school or child care program should have a policy about physical distancing.

Young children need to be close to caregivers during diapering, feeding, and comforting. Your child's ECE program may use cohorting.

Cohorting means keeping children together in a small group and having each group stay together throughout an entire day. This is used to limit the number of children and staff who come in contact with each other. Your child's program may also maximize time outdoors, stagger drop-off and pick-up times, and maintain 6 feet between cohorts.



For more information about physical distancing in schools, see [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#).

Screening testing

Your child's school or ECE program may use a [screening testing program](#). Screening testing helps schools and programs identify people infected with COVID-19 but may not be showing symptoms. This helps to quickly [isolate](#) anyone who tested positive for COVID-19 and identify anyone who may have been exposed to them so they can quarantine. Learn when your child should [quarantine](#).

Decisions about screening testing will be made at the state or local level. Ask your child's school or ECE program about any testing, quarantine, or isolation policies.

Ventilation

Improving ventilation can reduce the number of virus particles in the air.

Your child's school or ECE program may:

- Opening multiple doors and windows.
- Using child-safe fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows.
- Making changes to the heating, ventilation, or air conditioning (HVAC) or air filtration systems.
- Opening or cracking windows in buses and other forms of transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk.



Handwashing

Teachers and staff, through the school or ECE, should:

- Teach students to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Remind students [to wash hands frequently](#) and help young children with handwashing.
- Provide hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if handwashing is not possible. Young children should have adult supervision when using hand sanitizer.
- Set up handwashing or hand sanitizing stations at facility entrances.

- Wash their hands after holding, washing, or feeding young children.
- Wash their hands before and after changing a child's diaper or handling infant bottles.



Keep your child home if they are sick

If [your child is sick](#) or has [symptoms of COVID-19](#), they should stay home. Call your child's healthcare provider for testing and care. Staying home when sick with COVID-19 keeps COVID-19 infections out of schools and early care and education programs and prevents spread to others.

Know when your child should [quarantine or isolate](#). Talk to your child's school or ECE program about when your child can return to school after being sick.

Contact tracing

Schools and ECE programs are encouraged to work with state and local health departments to conduct contract tracing. If you are contacted by your health department about your child and a COVID-19 exposure, work with them to know if your child needs to isolate or quarantine.

Visitors

Your child's school or ECE program may limit nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities. Visitors should not go into schools if they are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19.

- You may not be able to enter the facility and instead may drop off and pick up your child outside.
- Alternative ways of connecting with your child's teacher or other parents may be used, such as outdoor or virtual meetings.

ECE programs should not limit access to mothers who are breastfeeding their infants.

Food service and meals

Your child's school or ECE program may adjust where and when children eat meals. This may include:

- Because masks are removed, physical distancing of at least 6 feet when moving through the food service line and while eating (especially indoors).
- Moving mealtime outside.
- Using additional spaces outside of the cafeteria for mealtime seating, such as the gymnasium or outdoor areas.
- Reminding children to wash hands, before and after eating.
- Improving ventilation in spaces where children eat if they must eat indoors.



Physical education and physically active play

Physical play is important for children. In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. In areas with [high numbers of COVID-19 cases](#), people should consider wearing a mask in crowded outdoor settings and for activities with close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated. When physical education and play are held indoors, children and staff should wear masks. Children and staff should physically distance when possible.

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Sports and other activities

Some [sports](#) may make players, coaches, and trainers more likely to get and spread COVID-19 because of physical contact and increased breathing. Other extracurricular activities, such as band, choir, theater, and school clubs that meet indoors, may also make students and staff more likely to get or spread COVID-19.

- Get your child vaccinated as soon as they are eligible to be able to participate in sports and other activities as safely as possible.
- Your child should wear a mask when participating in indoor sports or activities.
- Sports and activities should take place outdoors whenever possible.
- Your child should not participate in these activities when they have [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 and should be tested.
- Students who participate in indoor sports and other higher-risk activities should continue to wear masks and physically distance as much as possible.
- Sports and activities may be cancelled or happen virtually when the number of cases in the community is extremely high.

[Learn more](#) about how your school administrators will make decisions about sports and extracurricular activities.

Related Pages

- › [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)
- › [COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs](#)
- › [Ventilation in Schools and Child Care Programs](#)

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