



Back to School Planning: Guiding Parents, Guardians and Caregivers



For many families, back to school planning will look different this year than it has in previous years. Your school will have new policies in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. You may also be starting the school year with virtual learning components. Whatever the situation, these checklists are intended to help parents, guardians, and caregivers, plan and prepare for the upcoming school year.

Some of the changes in schools' classroom attendance or structure may include:

- **Cohorts:** Dividing students and teachers into distinct groups that stay together throughout an entire school day during in-person classroom instruction. Schools may allow minimal or no interaction between cohorts (also sometimes referred to as pods).
- **Hybrid:** A mix of virtual learning and in-class learning. Hybrid options can apply a cohort approach to the in-class education provided.
- **Virtual/at-home only:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.

Planning for In-Person Classes

Going back to school this fall will require schools and families to work together even more than before. Schools will be making changes to their policies and operations with several goals: supporting learning; providing important services, such as school meals, extended daycare, extracurricular activities, and social services; and limiting the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Teachers and staff can teach and encourage preventive behaviors at school. Likewise, it will be important for families to emphasize and model healthy behaviors at home and to talk to your children about changes to expect this school year. Even if your child will attend school in-person, it is important to prepare for the possibility of virtual learning if school closes or if your child becomes exposed to COVID-19 and needs to stay home.

CDC has created a checklist to help with back to school planning for school year (SY) 2020-2021. If your school uses a hybrid model, you may want to review both the in-person and virtual/at-home learning checklists.

Actions to take and points to consider:

- Check in with your child each morning for signs of illness. If your child has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher, they should not go to school.
- Make sure your child does not have a sore throat or other signs of illness, like a cough, diarrhea, severe headache, vomiting, or body aches.
- If your child has had close contact to a COVID-19 case, they should not go to school. Follow guidance on what to do when someone has known exposure.

Identify your school point person(s) to contact if your child gets sick.

Name of school point person(s):

Contact information:

Be familiar with local COVID-19 testing sites in the event you or your child develops symptoms. These may include sites with free testing available.

My local testing options:

Call:



Visit:

Cloth Face Coverings for Children

If your school is requiring or encouraging the use of cloth face coverings, think about the following actions. Consider asking what steps your school will take to minimize the potential for students to be singled out or teased for wearing or not wearing a mask. Appropriate and consistent use of face coverings may be challenging for some children. Wearing cloth face coverings should be a priority when it is difficult for students to stay 6 feet apart from each other (e.g., during carpool drop off or pick up, when entering the building or standing in line at school, or while on the bus).



Actions to take and points to consider:

Have multiple cloth face coverings, so you can wash them daily and have back-ups ready. Choose cloth face coverings that:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
 - Completely cover the nose and mouth
 - Are secured with ties or ear loops
 - Include multiple layers of fabric
 - Allow for breathing without restriction
 - Can be washed and machine dried without damage or change to shape
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- Label your child's cloth face coverings clearly in a permanent marker so that they are not confused with those of other children.
 - Practice with your child putting on and taking off cloth face coverings without touching the cloth.
 - Explain the importance of wearing a cloth face covering and how it protects other people from getting sick.
 - Consider talking to your child about other people who may not be able to wear cloth face coverings for medical reasons (e.g., asthma). As a family, model wearing cloth face coverings, especially when you are in situations where physical distancing is difficult to maintain or impossible.
 - If you have a young child, help build their comfort wearing a cloth face covering and become comfortable seeing others in face covers.
 - Praise your child for wearing a cloth face covering correctly.
 - Put a cloth face covering on stuffed animals.
 - Draw a cloth face covering on a favorite book character.
 - Show images of other children wearing cloth face coverings.
 - Allow your child to choose their cloth face covering that meets any dress requirements your school may have.

Consider providing your child with a container (e.g., labeled resealable bag) to bring to school to store their cloth face coverings when not wearing it (e.g., when eating).

Mental Health & Social-Emotional Wellbeing Considerations:

Since the school experience will be very different from before with desks far apart from each other, teachers maintaining physical distance, and the possibility of staying in the classroom for lunch, it is unlike anything your child is used to. Before school is in session, you may want to talk to your child and explain that all these steps are being taken to keep everyone safe and healthy. The list below provides actions and considerations regarding your child's mental health and emotional well-being as they transition back to in-person school. In addition, if your child seems to need mental health or behavioral services (e.g., social skills training, counseling), you may want to ask your school administrator for more information on these services.

Actions to take and points to consider:

- Talk with your child about how school will look different (e.g., desks far apart from each other, teachers maintaining physical distance, possibility of staying in the classroom for lunch).
- Talk with your child about how school is going and about interactions with classmates and teachers. Find out how your child is feeling and communicate that what they may be feeling is normal.
- Anticipate behavior changes in your child. Watch for changes like excessive crying or irritation, excessive worry or sadness, unhealthy eating or sleeping habits, difficulty concentrating, which may be signs of your child struggling with stress and anxiety.
- Try to attend school activities and meetings. Schools may offer more of these virtually. As a parent, staying informed and connected may reduce your feelings of anxiety and provide a way for you to express any concerns you may have about your child's school.
- Ask your school about any plans to reduce potential stigma related to having or being suspected of having COVID-19.
- Check if your school has any systems in place to identify and provide mental health services to students in need of support. If so, identify a point of contact for these services at your school.
- Check if your school has a plan to help students adjust to being back in school. Students might need help adjusting to how COVID-19 has disrupted their daily life. Support may include school counseling and psychological services (including grief counseling), social-emotional learning (SEL)-focused programs and curricula, and peer/social support groups.
- Check if your school will provide training for students in mindfulness, incorporating SEL into classroom curriculum (either virtually or in-person), or support a child's ability to cope with stress and anxiety. If not, consider asking about ways to add this to your child's at-home learning.

You can be a role model for your child by practicing self-care:

- Take breaks
- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise
- Eat well
- Stay socially connected



Preparing for Virtual or At Home Learning

Things to consider as you get ready

Virtual learning may be a choice or part of a child's educational experience this year, and it may be necessary if your child has certain underlying health conditions or is immunocompromised. In a hybrid model, learning may occur virtually during part of the week and occur in-person for the rest. Or, the school year may start with virtual learning but switch to in-person learning for the remainder or certain times of the school year. Going back to school virtually may pose additional challenges with staying connected to peers, since students may have less frequent or no in-person interactions to each other. You may want to talk to school staff to learn more about what they are doing to support connection among students, interactive learning with feedback, building resilience, and social-emotional wellbeing for students who will not be onsite.

Setting up for Virtual or At-Home Learning

Actions to take and points to consider:

- Try to attend school activities and meetings. Schools may offer more of these virtually. These meetings can be a way to express any concerns you may have about the school's plans.
- Create a schedule with your child and make a commitment to stick with it. Structure and routine can greatly help your child from falling behind with assignments. Discuss your family's schedule and identify the best times for learning and instruction, as well as family-oriented physical activity, such as walks outside. A family calendar or other visuals could be useful for keeping track of deadlines and assignments.
- Try to find a space where you live that's free of distractions, noise, and clutter for learning and doing homework. This could be a quiet, well-lit place in your dining room or living room or a corner of your home that could fit a small table, if available.
- Identify opportunities for your child to connect with peers and be social—either virtually or in person, while maintaining physical distance.

Here are some things to look for when reviewing your school's plan for virtual or at-home learning. Some of these action items and points to consider might warrant additional conversations with your school administrators or healthcare provider.



Actions to take and points to consider:

- Find out if there will be regular and consistent opportunities during each day for staff and student check-ins and peer-to-peer learning.
 - Find out if students have regular opportunities for live video instruction by teachers or if they will primarily be watching pre-recorded videos and receive accompanying assignments.
 - Ask if the school will offer virtual or socially distanced physical activity. If not, identify ways to add physical activity to your child's daily routine.
 - Ask your school what steps they are taking to help students adjust to being back in school and to the ways that COVID-19 may have disrupted their daily life. Supports may include school counseling and psychological services, social-emotional learning (SEL)-focused programs, and peer/social support groups.
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- If your child participates in school meal programs, identify how your school district plans to make meals available to students who are learning virtually at home.
 - If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan or receives other learning support (e.g., tutoring), ask your school how these services will continue during virtual at-home learning.
 - If your child receives speech, occupational or physical therapy or other related services from the school, ask your school how these services will continue during virtual at-home learning.
 - If your child receives mental health or behavioral services (e.g., social skills training, counseling), ask your school how these services will continue during virtual at-home learning.
 - If you anticipate having technological barriers to learning from home, ask if your school or community can provide support or assistance for students without appropriate electronic devices for schoolwork.
 - If your school offers a hybrid model, be familiar with your school's plan for how they will communicate with families when a positive case or exposure to someone with COVID-19 is identified and ensure student privacy is upheld.