

A resource guide for parents during COVID-19



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There’s truly no one-size-fits-all solution for how families will transition back-to-school this year. With the many changes and questions COVID-19 has created the past several months, parents may feel overwhelmed with the task of learning and interpreting ever-changing information, guidelines and mandates to keep their families safe.

While we don’t have all the answers, Akron Children’s has created a resource for guidance and information to help our kids – your kids – transition, adjust and succeed during this upcoming, unpredictable, 2020/2021 school year. Each family’s decision may be different – or different for each child – so trust in knowing the best decision is an informed decision that works for your situation.

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The COVID-19 pandemic

Your kids are hearing about [coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) from friends, social media and the news, but [the best source for information is from their most trusted resource – you](#). Be honest with your kids if you don't have the answers, but equally important is listening to them to better understand what your kids know and how they're feeling about it. Many things are happening outside of our control so sometimes the best things to focus on are the [things we can control](#) like washing hands, masking, distancing, exercising and keeping up with school work.

Scientific data about COVID-19 continues to develop, so it's important to [educate yourself about the virus](#) to help your child understand what's happening and [how to decide](#) the best way for your family to [return back to school during COVID-19](#).



The basics

The latest American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [advice](#) says children learn best when they are in school. Schools provide more than just academics – it's also where kids learn social and emotional skills, and gain access to healthy meals, the internet and other vital services.

In order to get kids back to school – in the classroom or virtually – we all have to work together to slow the spread of the virus. For parents, this means modeling good behaviors at home and supporting school administrators who may change or adopt new policies throughout the school year to help keep kids and teachers safe.

There are 4 important things everyone – you, your child and school staff – can do every day to help slow the spread of COVID-19: temperature checks, washing hands, masking and distancing.



Temperature checks

It is **ALWAYS** important to monitor children for fever as a sign of illness before sending them to school. If a child has a fever over 100°F, contact a health care provider and keep your child home from school.

- Schools will each decide on temperature screening at their entrances. However, doing so will increase the wait times to enter school and require social distancing for those waiting in line.
- Schools will monitor students for signs and symptoms of illness at school as they have in the past. If a student becomes sick at school, their temperature will be taken. Most school policies require student dismissal for fever over 100°F.



Hand washing

Regular hand washing is one of the best ways to remove germs, avoid getting sick and prevent the spread of germs to others. [Hands should be washed for 20 seconds](#) using warm water and soap at a minimum when:

- Entering a classroom
- Before eating
- Before boarding the bus at the end of the day
- After restroom use
- Anytime hands are dirty
- Before putting on and after removing a face covering
- First thing when entering the home after school

Hand sanitizer should be available, but hand washing – for 20 seconds – should be performed after 2 uses of hand sanitizer. Learn more on [how to best use hand sanitizer](#).





Masking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that all school reopening plans support behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19, including the use of face coverings.

As of Aug. 4, 2020, the [Ohio Department of Health](#) issued a health order requiring K-12 children wear face coverings while at school. The new mandate comes after the Ohio Children's Hospital Association and American Academy of Pediatrics Ohio Chapter [issued a joint letter](#) recommending widespread use of masks in schools with the following exceptions:

- Children under the age of 2 years old
- Any child unable to remove the face covering without assistance
- A child with a significant behavioral/psychological issue undergoing treatment that is worsened specifically by the use of a facial covering (ie., severe anxiety or a tactile aversion)
- A child living with severe autism or with extreme developmental delay who may become agitated or anxious wearing a mask
- A child with a facial deformity that causes airway obstruction

General guidance for adults and school staff include:

- Adults should always wear face coverings unless alone in a room/office.
- Face shields offer additional protection in combination with masking. Face shields can be recommended as an alternative to masks when it is absolutely necessary such as staff instructing students who are deaf, hearing impaired, in speech therapy sessions and/or are ESL (English as a Second Language) students.

Watch our [face mask etiquette video](#) for instructions on safely wearing a face covering.

For face coverings to work effectively, they should be [cleaned daily](#), and hands should be washed before putting on and after taking off a mask.



Distancing

Maintaining physical distancing of 6 feet in public places, including school, is ideal and highly recommended. This may be challenging for in-person classrooms, however schools should have plans in place for physical distancing in classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms, restrooms, office areas, playgrounds, gymnasiums and auditoriums.

- Learn more about [social distancing](#) and the [importance of 6 feet](#).



Avoid these common mistakes with face coverings:

5 mistakes to avoid with your mask

MISTAKE #1
Not washing your hands

MISTAKE #2
Not covering your nose and mouth

MISTAKE #3
Touching or adjusting mask

MISTAKE #4
Masking too late, removing it too soon

MISTAKE #5
Reusing old/dirty masks

Think Safe Be Safe

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Sick and COVID-19 sick

Since many symptoms for influenza (flu) and COVID-19 can look similar, we recommend parents use caution and plan for illness-related school absence to occur through the course of the school year.



COVID-19 and the flu

COVID-19 and flu are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but are caused by different viruses. Both illnesses can bring a wide-range of similar symptoms – from mild to severe – including:

- **Fever or feeling feverish/chills**
- **Cough**
- **Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing**
- **Fatigue (tiredness)**
- **Sore throat**
- **Runny or stuffy nose**
- **Muscle pain or body aches**
- **Headache**
- **Vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults)**

Symptoms *uniquely* associated with COVID-19 also include changes in, or loss of, taste or smell.

<https://www.akronchildrens.org/files/868380/file/flu-versus-covid-flyer-3597.pdf>

If you notice these symptoms, call your pediatrician who will know your child's health history or special risks and will tell you what to do next.

[Learn more about who to call, when to call and what to do](#) if your child gets sick this school year.



Act now symptoms

Seek immediate medical attention if your child is experiencing emergency warning signs such as, but not limited to:

- **Trouble breathing**
- **Persistent pain or pressure in the chest**
- **New confusion**
- **Inability to wake or stay awake**
- **Bluish lips or face**



Call from school

If a child is sent home from school due to concerning symptoms, the best option is to have your child tested for COVID-19. Contact your pediatrician for advice.

- A negative test result will allow a child to return to school when appropriate based on their symptoms.
- Having symptoms of COVID-19 without testing **OR** having a positive test result requires isolation for 10 days after the first day symptoms appear and improvement of symptoms, **AND** going at least 24 hours since last fever without using fever-reducing agents **AND** other symptoms have improved. If a child is without symptoms but tests positive, the 10-day isolation period begins with the date of the test.



School staff or child tests positive

If a child or staff member at a school is diagnosed with COVID-19, cases must be reported to local health departments, and contact tracing is the best way to identify those who may be at risk for exposure. Interviews will determine who has been in contact with an infected person and their level of risk. Recommendations may be made for further care, testing, isolation and quarantine. Schools will work with their local health department to determine the need for school closure(s) or other actions.



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In addition to symptoms, COVID-19 has been known to show other complications in kids including:

Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)

MIS-C is a rare, but severe complication. While this syndrome can look differently from one child to the next, the one constant symptom is fever. If parents see a fever of 100.4°F and it's unrelenting over several days and they see their child is not behaving typically, it's time to call the pediatrician.



COVID toes or chilblains

“COVID toes” or chilblains is a condition that often includes painful, swollen and discolored toes. Many patients may test negative for COVID-19 through nasal swabs, but it’s believed the same virus can attack the blood vessels and cause the color change in toes. The condition may appear alarming, but it usually goes away in 1 to 3 months. Because scientists aren’t sure if these patients are contagious, call your pediatrician for guidance.



Stay home or quarantine?

It's important to know when to [keep your child home](#) and isolated if they are sick or in quarantine if they have been in [close contact](#) with someone who has COVID-19.

If you've been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed, quarantine is best. [Quarantine](#) is used to keep someone *who might have been exposed* to COVID-19 away from others to stop the spread. [Learn about close contact and different scenarios](#) to determine if and for how long to quarantine before being around other people.



Supporting my child

We're starting a school year like none we've seen in recent times so prepare kids to be patient and flexible. While COVID-19 is changing how school looks, it's also impacting kids' physical, emotional and mental well-being. Arming yourself with resources to support their needs can help them cope and even thrive during these challenging times.



Anxiety

Stress and anxiety can affect everyone differently, but it's how we cope with these emotions that dictate their impact on us. Anxiety is a normal signal to pay attention to how we're feeling so we can protect ourselves. But when we're consumed by anxiety, it can be sometimes be harmful.

- Talk to children openly about their feelings and how COVID-19 is impacting their lives.
- Seek mental health services at school or through [Akron Children's](#) if a child expresses anxiety or symptoms of depression to ensure adequate support during these stressful times.
- Pay extra attention to children with a previous history of anxiety, depression or other mental health diagnoses.

[Here are some tips to help cope with anxiety](#) and give you a sense of control even during an uncertain time.

Know when to reach out for help. If your child is having trouble sleeping, eating or interacting in out-of-the ordinary ways, reach out to your pediatrician for guidance or seek help from a [behavioral health](#) specialist.



Asthma

So far, kids with asthma aren't getting the COVID-19 virus more often than people who don't have asthma. Since asthma and COVID-19 both affect the lungs, and so much is still being learned about the virus, parents should keep up with their child's asthma care to keep lungs healthy. This includes taking all regular [asthma medicines](#) unless the child's care team tells you to stop. To be safe, keep about 30 days' worth of medicine (including inhalers and nebulizers, if needed) and other needed supplies on hand.



Autism

Adjusting to a new routine is stressful for everyone, but especially for children with [autism](#) or those who have trouble with change. To provide additional support, learn more ways to help your child [adjust and understand COVID-19](#).

Bullying

Bullying takes on many forms and can be experienced in many ways – in-person or online – which can make it difficult for kids to avoid. The good news is that bullying is preventable. Educate yourself and your children on [how to stop bullying before it starts](#).

Know the signs that your child may be [the victim of bullying](#), including a greater-than-normal desire to miss school, dropping grades, moodiness and a loss of enthusiasm for activities your child usually enjoys.

Talk to your kids to make sure they understand what [cyberbullying](#) is and can recognize it when it happens. If kids think they are being harassed or targeted, they should not delete the messages, but show them to a parent or a trusted adult who can intervene and help navigate next steps.

Depression

[Adolescents and teens](#) often face new challenges, like managing COVID-19 and social pressures. Not to mention, their growing bodies are changing rapidly, which may cause feelings of sadness or frustration due to the hormonal changes that come with puberty.

Take time to regularly talk to your children about what's going on in their lives, but be sure to avoid making them feel like there's something wrong with them or that they're in trouble. Be supportive and honest, and keep the lines of communication open.

If you think a child may be suffering from depression, don't wait to get help. [Seeking treatment at the first sign of a problem](#) can be more effective and prevent problems later in a child's life.



High-risk health considerations

While COVID-19 school policies can reduce exposure risk, they will not eliminate it. Even with safety steps in place, some students with [high-risk medical conditions](#) may need to continue distance learning or make other accommodations. Talk with your pediatrician and school staff (including school nurses) to determine if your child can safely return to school.

Learning – in-person or virtual

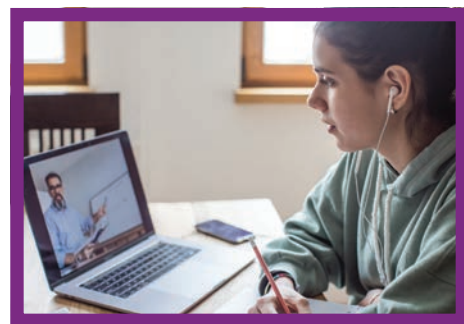
School districts are adjusting academic instruction for in-person classroom settings with strict protocols, virtual learning or a hybrid of both. Parents naturally want the safest option, while still advancing their children academically. To determine what's best for your child, [base your decision on sound reasoning](#) that also incorporates your child's developmental needs. For help with this decision, download the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Back to School Decision Making Tool](#).

Kids do better with school when parents are involved in their academic lives so look for ways to support [learning in and out of the classroom](#) all year long.

Nutrition

Many students receive healthy meals through school meal programs. More information about food and nutrition services is available on the [USDA website](#). Additionally, check with your school to understand how the meal program works if the school closes or if your child is sick and stays home from school.

Beyond the school meal program, it's important to [talk with kids about good nutrition](#) since they may be reaching for more snacks if they're learning from home or distancing from others.



Organization

Organization is a skill that must be taught and built upon as a child develops. Some children may be overwhelmed by the thought of staying organized through a combination of virtual and in-person learning this year, but [boiling down the basics of organization](#) will help teach your child how to be successful in areas such as:

- **Categorizing** - knowing where an item or person needs to be.
- **Staying focused** - doing what's expected or following a list and sticking with it.
- **Getting it done** - finishing a task by checking the work and completing the finishing touches.

Return to sports and activities

Most schools are offering a phased-in approach to athletics that allows kids to safely return to play amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Each school district may have different policies in place depending on the type of sport being played and other mandates from state health departments and regional/state athletic associations, but the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) offers basic guidance on how to keep kids healthy as sports resume in the midst of COVID-19.

Even with the uncertainty surrounding kids and the fall sports season, families should [stay on track with getting a sports physical](#) for their child this year.

Care should also be taken when allowing kids to [return to playgrounds and parks](#).

Routines

Having a predictable routine is good for the behavioral and mental health of kids. Regardless of whether your child returns to school in-person or virtually, stick to [consistent, regular bed](#) and wake-up times, meal and snack times and exercise breaks while easing into school and homework routines.



Screen time and social media

In a time of social distancing, social media has become an even more popular platform for kids and teens to connect. Add in the possibility of virtual learning this school year, and kids will be spending large chunks of their day on electronic devices. It's important for parents to [monitor screen time](#) and set consistent 'house rules' to limit the overuse of devices. To help avoid the negative impact digital media can have on kids such as fatigue, headaches, anxiety and depression, parents should [make time for meaningful in-person conversation](#) with their kids daily.



Stress and mental wellness

Your child's school should anticipate a wide range of mental health needs that can impact students and staff [struggling with stress from the pandemic](#), but parents should also be prepared to help their kids manage stress by knowing the signs and [warning signs and ways they can help kids cope](#).

Wellness visits

Yearly wellness visits are an important way for parents and health care providers to keep kids healthy – physically, mentally and socially – from birth through age 21. Remember to schedule your child's annual check-up, even during a pandemic.

Wellness visits cover things like monitoring physical, behavioral, developmental and emotional well-being, as well as keeping kids up to date on immunizations to prevent the spread of other communicable diseases. They also provide an opportunity for parents or kids to talk with a physician about concerns related to sleep, nutrition or stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because we understand the importance of regular health care for kids, Akron Children's has implemented COVID-19 safety measures in all of our locations. Our top priority will always be the safety of our patients, their families and our staff. Visit akronchildrens.org/coronavirus to learn more about our safety measures.



Akron Children's Resources

Get the care you need for your child when and where you need it:

- [Find a pediatrician](#)
- [Emergency Care](#)
- [Quick Care Online](#)
- [Urgent Care](#)
- [Tips for a successful telehealth visit](#)

General information about returning to school:

- [Akron Children's Anywhere](#) app supports families with timely access to a variety of health care information
- [FAQs about a safe return to school](#)



Akron Children's offers [many programs and services](#) to support the health and wellness of kids, including:

- [Eating Disorders Program](#) helps children, teens and young adults manage disordered eating behaviors and establish new patterns of thinking about and approaching food.
- [Healthy Active Living Program](#) provides comprehensive evaluation and treatment for children and teens who are overweight.
- [School Health Services](#) helps kids who have chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, manage their illnesses at school.
- [School Success Clinic](#) helps children, teens and young adults with academic needs.



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Stay informed

Parents and educators need to work hand-in-hand more than ever this year. Talk with [local school administrators](#) to learn what your school is doing to keep kids safe and understand the guidance many districts are using in their [planning considerations](#) for a [safe return to school](#).

If you have additional questions about keeping kids healthy this school year, check out more Akron Children's [COVID-19 resources](#).



Ground rules for this guide



This guide is intended to provide evidence-based guidance and best practices on how to keep kids safe and healthy, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. With so many unknowns about COVID-19 and conditions that can change rapidly as new information becomes available, please keep in mind the following as you read this packet:

- Each school district will make the final decisions regarding how and when students will return to their schools, either in-person, online or a combination.
- These recommendations are based on guidelines from the [CDC](#), [AAP](#), [Ohio Governor's Guidelines for School Re-entry](#) and [Big 8 Plus Health and Safety Coalition of Ohio](#), a group of school nursing leaders from Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown city schools.
- These recommendations are intended to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19 but cannot eliminate the risk of exposure. This means that it's still possible for a student or school employee to test positive for COVID-19 at some point.
- Physical distancing, hand hygiene and face coverings remain the top priority to protect students and staff members, and they are essential to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools, among friends and family, and throughout the community.



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