

COVID-19

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Vital
Strategies

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Protecting and Educating Our Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic



There is still so much we don't know about COVID-19, but we have important decisions to make. The question of whether and how to re-open schools this fall is one of the most difficult decisions.

About Us

Vital Strategies is a global public health organization working in 70+ countries to strengthen public health systems. Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, aims to prevent at least 100 million deaths from cardiovascular disease and epidemics.

More information at
PreventEpidemics.org
ResolveToSaveLives.org
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Schools are essential to the educational and social development of children and the functioning of the economy. As places where large groups of people gather and mix indoors, they are also a place where the virus can spread. Available evidence suggests that children may be somewhat less likely to become infected with COVID-19 and to spread it to others. If children do get infected, they are definitely much less likely to get seriously ill. **But reopening schools can only be done if COVID-19 is under control in the community, schools make adjustments to protect the safety of students, their families, teachers and staff, and all involved prepare for cases to occur in the school community.**

With careful planning and precautions, we can make schools safer and increase the likelihood that schools will open ... and stay open. There are eight basic safety measures to follow:

1 Shield the most vulnerable: Anyone with underlying health conditions should participate remotely and not return to school in person unless there is little or no community transmission.

2 Reduce risk whenever possible: Reduce the number of surfaces touched (e.g., keep hallway doors open) and forgo large assemblies and choir. Close cafeterias; students should instead eat in classrooms.



3 Keep the virus out: Schools should forbid non-essential visits and require everyone who enters to wash their hands (or apply hand sanitizer) on entry and mask up. No one should come to school when sick, and every person who works at the school should have paid sick leave.

4 Reduce occupancy, especially indoors: Keep students physically apart. Consider alternate day or alternate week schedules to reduce crowding, especially of older students. Rearrange classrooms by orienting desks in the same direction instead of facing each other. Whenever conditions allow, hold class outdoors.

5 Reduce mixing among students and staff: Divide students and staff into smaller cohorts or “pods” which stay together throughout the day. Close staff break rooms and limit in-person interactions among adults.

6 Mask up: Students, teachers, and staff should all mask up throughout the day, and schools might consider monitoring and reward systems to encourage mask-wearing.



7 Implement new health and safety protocols: Install handwashing and sanitizing stations and increase cleaning during and at the end of the school day, and of buses. Limit sharing of supplies.

8 Prepare for cases: Despite precautions, there will inevitably be COVID-19 cases. Schools must function as if the virus could arrive at any moment and be ready to respond and provide ongoing education when it does. Responding quickly and effectively can prevent cases from growing into large outbreaks.