

Preparing for School during COVID-19

Children need structure to learn, to socialize and to maintain good mental health. Here are some ways to prepare children for back to school, safely.

- Stay informed. Check [credible sources](#) for the latest information
- Learn to be flexible as schools adapt.
- Have a plan, in case your child needs to stay home.
- Teach children handwashing, physical distancing and the proper way to wear a mask.
- Explain how their classrooms may be different.
- Greet others with a smile, a wave or nod from a distance.
- Remind children not to share their mask, food and other personal items.
- Make sure their vaccinations are up to date, including the flu vaccine in October.
- Create a routine to [screen](#) your child for symptoms of COVID-19, before school each day.
- Keep your child at home if they are sick, and get tested.
- Take care of yourself to manage your own stress. Children can sense your stress or anxiety.

1. How will public health measures reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools?

Following public health measures in schools will keep students and staff safe. The most important measures continue to be physical distancing as much as possible, wearing a mask, staying home when sick, and washing hands. Schools will be doing enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch areas, and using barriers such as plexiglass to prevent the spread.

2. Should I send my child to school?

Everyone needs to make decisions that are best for their children and family. Factors to consider include:

- Your child's ability to follow directions for physical distancing, wearing a mask, etc.
- Ability to homeschool. The educational needs for each child may be different.
- If you have vulnerable relatives, such as older grandparents, sibling or others with health issues in your social circle.

3. How will the cohorts in school differ from the social circle we have for our family?

- Children in schools will be part of a cohort (or dedicated group) of students, which is different from a [social circle](#).
- In a cohort, students should still practice physical distancing as much as possible, and wear a mask when they are indoors and also outdoors when physical distancing is not possible.
- In a social circle households can have up to 10 people in their circle with whom they can interact without keeping a physical distance or wearing masks.

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- Families that have people who are at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 in their social circle should re-evaluate their social circle based on their own risk assessment.

4. What kind of face mask should we use?

- The best mask is the one that fits comfortably.
- [Cloth mask](#) should be made with two or more layers of fabric and be easy to breathe through.
- It should be large enough to cover the nose, mouth and chin without gapping.
- Plastic masks or face shields are not a substitute for cloth masks.
- Send your child to school with two bags for masks, one labelled "clean" and one "dirty." Pack several masks each day. Instruct your child to put their mask in the "dirty" bag if it gets wet or soiled, and to use a new, clean mask. Wash the masks at the end of each day for reuse.

5. What happens if someone at school gets COVID-19?

If someone at school contracts COVID-19, Toronto Public Health (TPH) will conduct an investigation to determine who had close contact with the individual. Public Health will then contact each person who had close contact. Due to privacy of personal health information, the name of the person who has COVID-19 will not be shared. Care must be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff. Schools should continue to be welcoming, respectful, inclusive and supportive environments for all.

6. Will the school close if someone gets COVID-19?

There is no set number of COVID-19 infections to determine if a school will need to close. It is not always necessary to shut down the entire classroom or school if there is a case of COVID-19 in the school. In addition, if the infection rate in the broader community increases, it may impact the number of people who get COVID-19 in schools. For the safety of everyone, there may be a time when schools need to close again.

7. Will there be public health support in the schools?

Toronto Public Health is establishing a team of more than 70 nurses who will support schools as they reopen. These nurses will form the school COVID-19 response team for TPH. They will support schools with COVID-19 prevention measures, mental health and well-being promotion. They will also conduct outbreak management, case investigations and contact tracing if someone at the school develops COVID-19.

8. What should families do for students with allergies or asthma?

Some children may have a chronic runny nose or cough because of a health condition. They can still attend school. If the symptoms are new or getting worse, they will need to stay home and get tested. Speak to your health care provider for more support.

9. If my child is sick, how do I get them tested?

For children with symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild, keep them at home. Call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000, your health care provider, or an [assessment centre](#) for testing. Children can often get a throat swab or swab in the front of their nose (instead of at the back of the nose), so the test will not be uncomfortable.

10. If a student is off sick, when can they return to school?

COVID-19 testing is very important to help determine when a student can return to school. In general, if the student:

- tested positive, they can return to school after 14 days, and once they have no symptoms
- tested negative, they can return to school 24 hours after they have no symptoms
- tested negative, but have to self-isolate as advised by public health, will need to continue isolation for the full 14 days
- if sick, but not tested, they may have to stay home for up to 14 days (the Ministry of Health will confirm guidance on this soon).

There are no clearance tests or doctor's note required for return to school. Public health will advise on the clearance date.

11. What are the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children?

COVID-19 is a new disease, and we are still learning about the long-term effects. This is why we must take every precaution to prevent the spread of infection.

12. Should students and teachers use the contact tracing app?

Yes, we encourage everyone to use the [COVID-19 Alert](#) app. The more people using the app, the better for everyone. If someone gets COVID-19, they will enter a key in the app which will anonymously alert others who may be close contacts to go for testing.

13. Why are you promoting outdoor learning and activities at school?

There is less risk of COVID-19 transmission outdoors. There is more open space to maintain two metre distancing. And with more natural airflow, the respiratory droplets will fall to the ground faster. Students are less likely to touch contaminated surfaces outdoors. When children are outside, they move more. Outdoor play is fun, good for physical activity and is important for healthy growth and development.