

CDC encourages layers of protection when school resumes

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Editor's note: For the latest news on COVID-19, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNewsCOVID19>.

Federal health officials are encouraging schools to return to in-person education this fall with layers of protection, including vaccines, masks for everyone who is not fully vaccinated and 3 feet of space between students in classrooms.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC's\) updated guidance](#) released today encourages schools to work with local public health officials to implement these protective measures, taking into account local virus transmission, vaccination rates, the existence of a screening program and [health equity](#).

Vaccination

Everyone ages 12 years and older is [eligible to be vaccinated](#). The CDC called vaccination “one of the most critical strategies to help schools safely resume full operations.”

Schools can help improve rates by encouraging vaccination, hosting information sessions, allowing excused absences for vaccination, helping teachers and students find vaccine locations and serving as vaccination sites.

Face masks

[Face masks](#) should be worn indoors by everyone ages 2 years and older who is not fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. Outdoors, masks are needed only in crowds or during activities with sustained close

contact with people who are not vaccinated.

The CDC notes some schools may opt to require masking for everyone regardless of vaccination status. Everyone riding a school bus must wear a mask even if they are vaccinated, [per CDC order](#). It is recommended schools provide masks to students who need them.

Distance

The CDC continues to recommend students in classrooms stay 3 feet apart. It calls for 6 feet of space between students and adults and between adults.

Not being able to maintain these space recommendations should not keep schools from conducting in-person learning and does increase the importance of using layers of protection.

Cohorts

Schools may choose to keep students and teachers in cohorts, small groups that stay together and have limited interactions with others. However, cohorts should not be based on vaccination status.

Screening testing

The CDC recommends screening testing of people who are not fully vaccinated to help identify those who are infected. This testing should be done at least once a week, and results should be reported within 24 hours. [A chart in the guidance](#) provides details about situations in which testing is recommended based on the activity, person and level of community transmission.

Contact tracing, isolation and quarantine

Anyone who is sick should stay home and get tested. A [CDC chart](#) provides steps to take if a student becomes sick or is diagnosed with COVID-19. The CDC also has detailed guidance on [contact tracing](#), [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) if someone is diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19.

People who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic don't need to quarantine or get tested after exposure to someone who is infected.

Additional layers of protection

In addition to the protective measures above, the CDC recommends adequate [ventilation](#), [handwashing](#) and [cleaning and disinfecting](#).

As local virus transmission declines, schools may decide to remove some of these measures. The CDC recommends if schools decide to remove prevention measures, they remove them one at a time and monitor the impact closely before removing another.

Schools also should modify protective measures for [people with disabilities](#) or other health issues, if needed.

Sports and extracurricular activities

Unvaccinated students playing indoor sports should continue to wear masks and distance as much as possible. Schools should consider using screening tests for individuals who are not vaccinated before these events to facilitate safe participation and reduce risk of transmission.

Students who are not fully vaccinated and have COVID-19 symptoms should not participate in sports or extracurricular activities and should get tested.

Resources

- [AAP interim guidance on school safety during the pandemic](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on in-person school during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

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