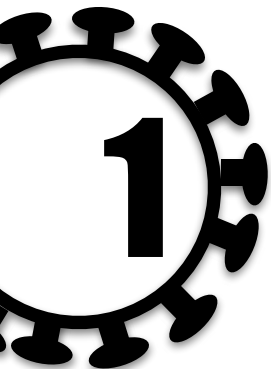


# FAQs About School Reopening and COVID

The decision on how to return to school is one that every family faces. These FAQs answer some of the most common questions that pediatricians have heard from parents. If you have other questions, don't hesitate to reach out to your school or your pediatrician.



## Q: What are schools doing to keep children safe from COVID-19?

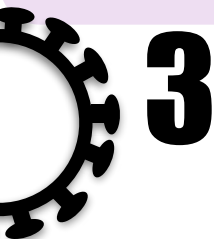
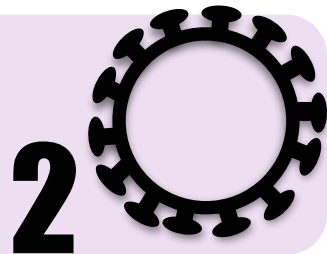
A: All schools in Massachusetts are required to create a plan to keep children safe when returning to school. For some school systems, this means keeping children home to do fully remote learning. For some school systems, this means full-time in person learning or the adoption of a hybrid model. For any in-person learning:

- Children in 2nd grade and up will be required to wear masks. Younger children may be required to wear masks in some districts.
- All children will need to practice physical distancing, staying at least three to six feet apart.
- All school systems will be required to help children practice frequent hand hygiene (washing their hands or using hand sanitizer).
- Many schools will keep children in small groups, called cohorts, for learning, play, and meals.

All of these steps will help keep children safe and reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 at school. Parents can help children by practicing mask-wearing and hand washing at home as well.

## Q: What happens if my child is exposed to an individual who tests positive for COVID?

A: The school would contact you to let you know if your child has been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID. "Close contact" means that your child was within six feet of the person for at least 10-15 minutes, even if both people were wearing masks. Your child would need to stay home to self-quarantine for 14 days and you would need to talk to your pediatrician's office about having your child tested to help stop the spread.



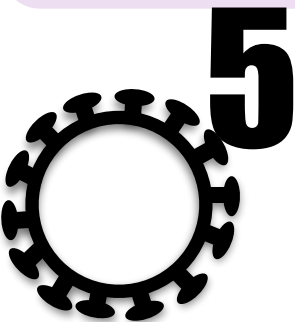
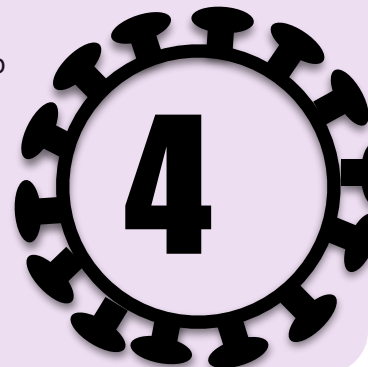
## Q: Are certain children at higher risk?

A: We are still learning about which medical conditions put children at higher risk for severe illness. Children with genetic, neurologic, and metabolic conditions should be monitored carefully. Children with obesity, diabetes, uncontrolled asthma, sickle cell disease or immunosuppression may be at higher risk. Most infants, children and adolescents with underlying conditions such as cancer who are infected with SARS-CoV-2 do not usually develop severe illness. Hispanic/Latino, Native American and black children have been hospitalized at higher rates.

## Q: How do I help my child who is anxious about the dangers of COVID?

A:

- Point out when people in the community are wearing masks and physically distancing to keep us all safe. Explain to your child that it is working! Massachusetts has a low rate of community infection.
- Knowledge is power: parents and youth can research COVID from reliable local websites like [mass.gov](http://mass.gov) and child health sites like [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org).
- Help children to focus on what they can do to control the spread: wearing masks, physically distancing and practicing good hand hygiene.
- Find ways to keep your children safely connected with friends, in person or virtually.
- Ask for help from school professionals, mental health specialists, or your pediatrician if you see changes in your child's mood or behavior.



## Q: How do I find out about the COVID transmission rate where I live or where my children attend school?

A: Massachusetts has had relatively low state transmission but it is most helpful to look at the local COVID data. You can find updated color-coded "Community level COVID-19" data in map and list form at [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov). Based on the average daily cases per 100,000 residents, each city or town has been designated as a higher risk (red), moderate risk (yellow), or lower risk (green) community. Communities with fewer than 5 cases are not given a designation.

# FAQs About Wearing Masks at School

**Q: Why does my child have to wear a mask on the way to school and at school?**

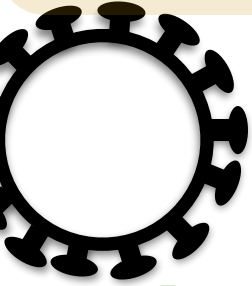
**A:** Masks help stop the spread of COVID-19 by blocking respiratory droplets from getting into the air and spreading to other people. Respiratory droplets are the tiny water droplets that come out of our mouths and noses when we breathe, talk, sing, cough and sneeze. They can contain the virus and are one of the ways that COVID-19 spreads. Children and adults in school are protecting each other from COVID transmission by wearing masks. If you have concerns about whether your child will be able to wear a mask, contact your school. They may be able to help.



**2**

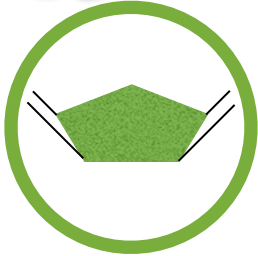
**Q: Is there anyone who shouldn't wear a mask?**

**A:** The vast majority of kids over age 2 can wear masks without a problem, including children with asthma. Some children with autism or anxiety may need extra help to get used to wearing a mask. Masks should NOT be put on babies, children younger than 2, or children who cannot remove the mask themselves because of the danger of suffocation. Contact your pediatrician if you have questions about your child's specific situation. If a child is having trouble breathing while at school, they should ask an adult for help.



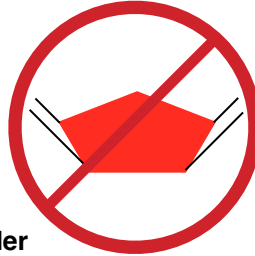
**Safe to wear a mask:**

- ✓ Asthma
- ✓ Intellectual disability
- ✓ Mental health disorder
- ✓ Communication barriers
- ✓ Autism/sensory processing disorder



**Not safe to wear a mask:**

- X Asleep
- X Mask is a strangulation or choking risk
- X Child cannot remove the mask on their own



**Q: Is it safe for my child to wear a mask all day?**

**A:** Wearing a clean mask is very safe. Health care workers have been wearing them all day for many years without any harmful effects.



**Q: How can I help my child wear a mask?**

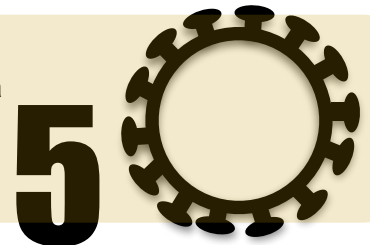
**A:**

- Be a great role model: wear your mask when you are out with your child!
- Help children understand that we are protecting others, like grandma and grandpa, when we wear masks.
- Make or decorate masks together with your child.
- Provide a mask with your child's favorite book or TV character on it.
- Practice! Start with short periods of mask wearing at home. Reward your child when they keep the mask on. Work up to longer periods of mask-wearing.

It's important to have several masks for your child to wear so that you can wash them daily.

**Q: What kind of mask is most effective?**

**A:** The mask should fit closely to the face. It must cover the mouth and nose and ideally should be a tightly woven fabric. Multiple layers may be most protective. Gaiters and bandannas may not be as effective and some schools are not allowing their use. Transparent masks may be useful for some adults who work with youth with hearing or communication impairments.



**Q: Will schools allow children to take off their masks?**

**A:** Schools will allow brief mask breaks throughout the day when children are spaced apart or outside.

