

Ways for children with disabilities to safely return to in-person school during COVID-19

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities have a higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection but a greater benefit from in-person schooling.

Based on data from the Special School District of St. Louis County, schools can take these steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep schools safe when returning in-person:

Have students and staff wear face masks

- Mask wearing is vital
- For students who cannot mask correctly, such as students with severe autism, consider other options:
 - Have these students wear face shields
 - Have staff wear face shields or goggles to protect their eyes
 - Use hand wipes often
 - Have good ventilation
- When students can't wear masks or social distancing is not possible such as during meals or personal care, staff should wear face shields

Practice safe social distancing

- Put as much space as possible between people - keep at least 3 feet of space
- Move some students to new spaces to lower the number within classrooms and make it easier to maintain social distancing
- Group students into small pods and keep them in 1 classroom except for gym and recess

Have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff

- Provide sufficient PPE to staff before starting in-person teaching, including masks, gloves, face shields, and goggles
- Quickly respond to all requests for more PPE



Tips for staff to help students with masking

Students have done much better than expected with correct masking. But some students may have trouble, especially those with special needs. Staff should:

- › **Model correct mask wearing**
- › **Check often and remind students to keep their masks over their noses** – with practice they get better. Staff can use a visual cue to remind students to pull up their mask, such as pointing at the tip of their nose
- › **Praise and reinforce good mask wearers**, such as with extra breaks or computer time
- › **Keep working on mask wearing** – do not give up on students who have trouble

Keep hands clean

- Encourage students and staff to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer often, especially after breaks and before eating
- Have hand wipes readily available to help students who cannot wash their hands



Clean, disinfect, and ventilate

- Clean and disinfect classrooms at the end of the day or between use by different groups of students
- Clean between having students in shared spaces such as therapy rooms – allow time between students for cleaning
- Use a sanitizing schedule for all common areas to coordinate cleaning
- Whenever possible, open windows to allow for better ventilation

Make sure people with COVID-19 symptoms stay home

- Students or staff who show any of these symptoms should stay home:
 - Fever (a temperature of 100.4° F or higher) or chills
 - Cough, shortness of breath, or trouble breathing
 - Fatigue, muscle or body aches, or headache
 - Sore throat, congestion, or runny nose
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Nausea, diarrhea, or vomiting
- Send home students or staff who begin to show symptoms while at school
 - School nurses should help to isolate these students and staff while they wait to go home, such as while waiting for a ride home

Commit to safety at the highest level of administration

- Lead by example and show this commitment to safety in all your actions
 - Communicate that school is going to look different and the school community must accept this
- Add nursing staff to respond to students who test positive (have COVID-19) and trace their contacts
- Cancel activities that do not comply with safety guidelines, such as potluck lunches or school assemblies

 [Learn more
sites.wustl.edu/
safereturn](https://sites.wustl.edu/safereturn)