

This document contains information to help answer some of your questions about the upcoming school year. The Agency of Education and the Vermont Department of Health released guidance for school programs to re-open in the Fall of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines support school programs to stay open and **provide a safe, healthy, and fun place for your children to grow, learn, and play**. Information for parents can be found at the Health Department's [website](#).

## Why it is important for school to open

Vermont's health and education experts agree that children and youth need to continue learning, and that school is the safest place for that to happen. Schools in Vermont support the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of children. For some families, school is where kids get healthy meals, access to the internet, and mental health services that cannot be provided with online learning.

## Why it is safe to open schools in Vermont

Vermont's Health Commissioner, Mark Levine, MD, believes: "we've come to a point in our response to this virus that allows us to bring our children back to school – in a carefully considered, measured, and safe way." Researchers studying COVID-19 have gathered enough [data](#) to support the safe re-opening of schools in Vermont because:

- The state has controlled the spread of COVID-19 over time by educating, testing, and [contact tracing](#) when there is a positive case.
- "[A Strong and Healthy Start Safety and Health for Reopening Schools](#)" informs schools on how to put safety measures in place before re-opening.
- Child care centers and camps have been open throughout the pandemic and their experience has shown [success](#) in keeping both children and staff safe.

## What we know about children and coronavirus

- Research from around the world has consistently found that younger children are less likely to spread the virus to each other or to adults. Most often adults spread this virus to children.
- Countries that have low number of people with COVID-19, like what is seen in Vermont, have successfully opened schools without outbreaks.

## How you can prepare your child for the changes

- Talk with them about changes they can expect to see at school this year.
  - School leaders, including school nurses and COVID-19 coordinators, are communicating about how their specific schools are set up and what the rules will be for students. This may look different depending on the age of your child.
- Be mindful of your child's social and emotional wellbeing and ask about how they are feeling. The CDC offers ideas on how to have these [conversations](#) with children of all ages.

## Things that will be different this fall

Change	Details
Prescreening	Students will be asked questions about their health every day before school and will have their temperature checked. Anyone with symptoms and/or fever will go home. This helps to limit the spread of illness in the school.
Bus seating	Seating on the bus will be different to accommodate physical distancing. Students may have assigned seats and the windows will be open to allow ventilation.
Masks will be worn unless there is a medical or developmental reason why a mask cannot be worn	Masks reduce the number of droplets that can spread from a person's mouth or nose into the air. The virus is found in those droplets.
Physical distancing in the classroom with desks spaced apart and all facing in the same direction	The virus that causes COVID-19 can more easily spread when people are closer together. Students sit at a distance and face the same direction to lower the chance of contact with the virus in droplets.
Frequent opportunities to wash hands or use hand sanitizer	Students and staff will clean their hands frequently to remove germs to stop the spread of the virus.
Students are grouped into a cohort or pod and travel together while at school	Consistently grouping students limits the number of contacts and reduces spread. If somebody tests positive for COVID-19, the school will know which students and staff were together. This will help with contact tracing.
Adults will be cleaning and disinfecting the school frequently	Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces will remove germs to help stop the virus from spreading when people touch things in a room.
Students and staff with <a href="#">symptoms</a> of COVID-19 will be asked to stay home	Keeping sick people home will help reduce the spread of all germs in the school community.
Plans and protocols will be followed when there are cases of COVID-19 in the school community	If there is a case of COVID-19, the school community and families will know what to expect from public health professionals.
Outside time – staff and students are required to wear masks while outside of the building if physical distancing cannot always be maintained.	Masks and physical distancing lower the chances that the virus can spread between people.

## What will happen if there is a case of COVID-19 in school

Currently Vermont has a low number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and the schools are working hard to make safe spaces for the staff and students. However, we still need to plan for the possibility of someone testing positive for COVID-19, or a small number of cases that may be linked to the school setting. There are many tools that can be used to protect the staff and children, such as:

- The person diagnosed with COVID-19 stays home from school and is instructed to [isolate](#) from others.
- The school administration and the Health Department works together to determine next steps, including if classrooms or the school needs to be closed.
- School administration communicates with families regarding the situation.
- Classrooms are cleaned and disinfected.
- The Health Department conducts [contact tracing](#) and talks with [close contacts](#), which includes people who were within 6 feet of the infected person for 15 or more minutes while they were infectious.
- Students and staff who are determined to be close contacts are given instructions to quarantine or isolate.
- Decisions about when a student or staff can return to school will be made with the school nurse, the person's health care provider, and the family.

These are proven public health methods that can prevent the need to temporarily move to remote instruction.