

Back to School Family Guide

09/01/2021

In-person learning is critical to our students' well-being and academic success. In another school year that is impacted by COVID-19, our schools, students, families and communities are asked to take measures to protect the health and safety of all.

As of July 1, 2021, Minnesota's peacetime emergency—including the Safe Learning Plan—has ended and as a result, decisions for the 2021-22 school year must be made locally.

This means that the State of Minnesota cannot require schools to implement additional health and safety precautions or provide a remote learning option. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has provided [Best Practice Recommendations](#) to help local school boards and school leaders design plans to protect the health and safety of students, staff and families. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has also created a process for schools to provide an online or blended learning option for families who may not feel comfortable returning to the classroom.

This guide was created to serve as a summary of information for families as they make decisions during the 2021-22 school year and includes information about Minnesota's health guidance, online learning options and school meals. It will be updated as necessary.

Health Guidance

With students, families and K-12 educators preparing for the start of the 2021-22 school year amid concerns about an uptick in COVID-19 cases driven by the Delta variant, health officials are recommending that schools follow CDC's guidance for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools this year. Local school communities will use the guidance to craft local plans and policies that support the needs of their communities.

Proactive COVID-19 prevention strategies remain critical to protecting people – including students, teachers, and staff – who are not fully vaccinated or who have certain medical conditions.

The guidance document, [Best Practice Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools for the 2021-22 School Year \(PDF\)](#) highlights CDC best practice recommendations for implementing layered prevention strategies (using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect people who are not fully vaccinated.

Among the key points covered in the guidance:

VACCINES

- All people ages 12 years and older should get vaccinated for COVID-19 before returning to in-person school, sports, or other activities to protect themselves and people around them who cannot get vaccinated. Talk to a health care provider or [Find Vaccine Locations](#) near you.

MASKING

- All students, teachers, staff, and visitors (age 2 years and older) in school buildings should wear masks indoors regardless of vaccination status.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

- Schools should maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms whenever possible. When it is not possible to maintain 3 feet of distance between students, it is especially important to layer other prevention strategies. Adults in school buildings should maintain 6 feet of physical distance between one another and from students whenever possible.

STAYING HOME WHEN SICK

- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home if they feel sick and should contact a health care provider for testing and care.

QUARANTINE

- Students, teachers, and staff who **have not been fully vaccinated** need to stay home and away from others if they have close contact with a confirmed case. A 14-day quarantine is the safest recommendation, but a shortened quarantine option may be considered when appropriate.
- Students, teachers, and staff who **have been fully vaccinated** do not need to stay home even if they have had recent close contact with a confirmed case so long as they do not have symptoms and do not test positive.
- Follow CDC testing guidance for anyone exposed to a confirmed case.

TESTING

- People who are not fully vaccinated and returning to in-person school, sports, or extracurricular activities (and their families) should get tested regularly for COVID-19 according to CDC guidance.
- Schools are encouraged to create local [COVID-19 Testing programs](#), and the state has provided funding in order to do so.
- Families can also [order an at-home test at no cost](#) or [find a location offering no cost testing](#).

ADDITIONAL MITIGATION MEASURES

- Schools should encourage ventilation, contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, handwashing, respiratory etiquette, cleaning, and disinfection as important layers of prevention.

Online Learning

Schools are no longer required to provide a distance learning option this school year because the executive orders requiring schools to provide a distance learning option were rescinded when the state's peacetime emergency ended. Given this, MDE has created an [expedited process for schools to offer online and blended learning](#) for the 2021-22 school year. These options allow districts to offer families online learning throughout the year for those that may prefer a virtual option as well as allow districts to respond to the pandemic at the local level.

Should any disruptions to in-person learning occur because of COVID-19 cases or close contacts, having the flexibility at the local level to shift to online learning will be vital to ensuring continuity in learning for students. MDE strongly encourages districts to apply to become online providers for all grades served, but districts/charters will determine local context and need.

If your school district or charter school does not offer an online learning option, [a list of approved online learning providers is available](#).

School Meals

Since the pandemic began in March 2020, schools have provided meals to all students free of charge through the U.S. Department of Agriculture child nutrition programs. During the 2021-21 school year, all schools can continue to provide meals to students at no charge through the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) program. Contact your child's school for more information.



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Contact covid-19.questions.mde@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.