



Family Questions & Answers

Priorities for a Safe Return to School for Children with Complex Health Needs

This document contains common questions and answers related to Priorities for a Safe Return to School for Children with Complex Health Needs found at ReSET4kids.org.

As a central principle, the safety of children with complex health needs requires the safety of all children and staff at school. **Families of children with complex health needs should be supported to make the best decision for their child about in-person school attendance** with their child's health care providers and school staff when considering the risks of COVID-19.

- ◇ There is so much information out there and I am having trouble making sense of it all. How can I know if I am making the best school attendance decision for my child?

Discussing the risks and benefits of in-person school attendance for your child might be the best place to start. Talk with your child (as appropriate) and work together with your child's health care team and special education staff to determine the best options. Use the resources on our ReSET4kids website to help you determine what your child needs to stay healthy at school. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Decision-Making Tool for Parents and Guardians website may also help you with your decision. It can be found [here](#).

Remember, what might be the right decision this month, may not be the right decision next month. It will be important to stay in regular contact with your child's special education teacher to make sure that you are on the same page about your child's attendance at school and implementation of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

PREVENT

- 1. Encourage all school staff (e.g., aides, therapists, teachers, school nurses) who work in close proximity with children with complex health needs to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and wear a mask whether vaccinated or not.**

- ◇ How do I know if school staff working with my child are vaccinated?

Your school district may not require staff to be vaccinated. This might vary from building to building. You can ask individual staff working with your child if they are vaccinated and encourage them to be vaccinated if they are not. For further information about COVID-19 vaccines, go [here](#).

- ◇ What if the staff working with my child choose not to wear a mask?

School districts have the authority to set masking and other infection control policies and practices. Have a conversation with your child's special education teacher or the school principal. While you can request that staff working with your child wear a mask, they cannot be forced to wear one. If your child is able to tolerate a mask or face shield, it will provide some protection. This expert group encourages masking for everyone at this time. This takes into consideration that students under age 12 are not yet eligible for vaccination and the needs of those students and that some staff cannot be vaccinated due to their medical condition or may have compromised immune systems and vaccines may be less effective.

- ◇ Who in my school would make masks available to students, staff and visitors?

Masks will likely be available at the main office or nurses office at your child's school or at the school district's office.

2. Ensure a respiratory protection plan is in place for school staff performing high-risk care, such as aerosol-generating procedures (e.g. tracheostomy suctioning, nebulized treatments, etc.). For those staff, that would include N95 mask fit testing or availability of Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR).

- ◇ I want to make sure that the school staff who support my child are protected against possible COVID-19 transmission – are there any guidelines for this?

Yes! The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) has published Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines to help keep school staff safe. They can be found [here](#).

3. Assign and maintain individual seats for children with complex health needs during transportation to and from school.

- ◇ That's great that there are recommendations for school busses. What are they?

The CDC requires that students wear masks on school buses. If your child is unable to wear a mask, this will need to be addressed as an accommodation in your child's IEP. Your child's special education teacher or case manager can help communicate any special seating. This related service can be put in your child's IEP.

PREPARE

4. Educate school staff and families about the increased health risks of contracting COVID-19 for children with complex health needs.

- ◇ Where can I find information on the impact of COVID-19 on my child with complex health needs?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has general information on their Caring for Children and Adolescents with Special Health Care Needs website [here](#). As you know, though, the health conditions of children with complex health needs vary greatly from child to child. Your child's health care providers will be the best resource you have for identifying the potential impact of COVID-19 on your child. We provide an example letter for your child's health care provider to communicate with the school about your child's unique health care needs on our ReSET4kids website [here](#).

5. Discuss COVID-19 mitigations strategies for children with complex health needs in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Specifically, develop plans that outline the child’s daily routines and contingency plans which account for COVID-19 safety.

- ◇ Who can help me develop this plan?

You can work with your child’s special education teacher or case manager to develop a COVID-19 mitigation plan. And remember, this plan is a tool that can and needs to be updated when the situation changes. The Wisconsin DPI also has guidance on conducting virtual IEP meetings on the DPI Virtual IEP Meeting website, which can be found [here](#). Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training and Support (WI-FACETS) can also support families and educators when they need help with the IEP process. The WI-FACETS website and contact information can be found [here](#).

- ◇ My child’s IEP was just updated last month, but we didn’t include anything on COVID-19 safety. What should I do?

If the IEP team determines that accommodations are needed to meet disability-related needs related to your child’s health conditions, then accommodations need to be written into the IEP. Remember, you can request an IEP meeting at any time to review and revise your child’s IEP. You also dispute resolution options if you disagree with a decision of the school or IEP team. More information can be found at the Wisconsin DPI Dispute Resolution Option website found [here](#).

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- ◇ My child’s chronic health condition causes them to have COVID-like symptoms. It is confusing for school staff to know if my child might have COVID-19 or not. What can I do to keep them from continually being sent home?

You can work with your child’s health care provider to provide the school with written information about the characteristics of your child’s health condition and outline what is typical for your child and what symptoms would cause concern. We provide an example letter for your child’s health care provider to communicate with the school about your child’s unique health care needs on our ReSET4kids website [here](#). You may share this information with your child’s school nurse and special education team.

In addition, many schools are participating in the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) COVID-19 testing program. If your child’s school has such a program, you may give permission for your child to be tested for COVID-19 at school if appropriate. This might offer both you and your child’s school reassurance that your child’s symptoms are not due to COVID-19.

6. Ensure that each child with complex health needs has their own medical equipment or single use disposable equipment at school.

- ◇ How can I supply the equipment and supplies that my child needs at school?

A solution to this can be found by talking with your child’s special education teacher or case manager. You should determine together the appropriate quantity of supplies to store at school and where they will be kept.

7. Plan to provide COVID-19 testing for staff and students at school.

- ◇ What if my school doesn't offer COVID-19 testing?

The Wisconsin DHS offers convenient, school-based testing for teachers, staff, students, and their families for the 2021-2022 school year. Information on the K-12 COVID-19 Testing Program can be found [here](#). Please remember that this is a voluntary program and your school may not choose to participate. Contact your child's health care provider if you are concerned that your child has active symptoms of COVID-19 and you want your child tested.

PARTNER

8. Partner with health care providers about ways to keep each child with complex health needs safe at school and circumstances in which a child should stay home.

- ◇ How can I make sure that the school follows the recommendations of my child's doctor?

Health care providers can give suggestions to families and schools about conditions that can help keep children healthy and when they might choose to stay home from school. We provide an example letter for your child's health care provider to communicate with the school about your child's unique health care needs on our ReSET4kids website [here](#). However, there is no guarantee that the school will follow these recommendations.

There is a series of five Wisconsin DPI-produced videos, ranging in length from 10 -15 minutes each, which give guidance to school staff when working with children with medical fragility during COVID-19. If you want to view this video series, you can access it [here](#). If you find yourself in conflict with school staff and the needs of your child, contact the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training and Support (WI-FACETS) who support families and educators when they need help with the IEP process. The WI-FACETS website and contact information can be found [here](#). If a conflict escalates, Disability Rights Wisconsin has protection and advocacy services that you can learn more about on their website [here](#).

9. Have at least one medical staff (such as a school nurse) available to address acute COVID-19 symptoms or questions.

- ◇ My child's school only has a school nurse in the building one day a week. Who can address these issues if the nurse is not there?

Ask your child's school principal who provides medical services or care if the school nurse is not in the building. The Wisconsin DPI provides guidance on their COVID-19 for School Health Services website [here](#).

ADAPT

10. Provide families of children with complex health needs with the opportunity to change between in-person and virtual or homebound school based on illness or COVID-19 spread.

- ◇ How can I be sure that my child's IEP is being followed when moving between in-school and online or homebound environments?

The Wisconsin DPI offers comprehensive training and information on this topic that might be very helpful to both families and teachers. It can be found on their Moving From In-Person to Virtual and Hybrid Learning Environments website [here](#). In brief, schools must provide a continuum of services to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services. A child with a disability who requires in-person specially designed instruction and related services in the home in order to make progress towards their IEP goals and in the general education curriculum, must receive in-person homebound services as part of a free and appropriate public education. A district may not have a policy that precludes a student who requires in-person services from receiving this education such as, all students who are homebound receive only virtual instruction (or packets). Additional information about homebound school instruction for families and schools can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

- ◇ How do I know if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in my child's school?

Public health departments request that families with children in school who have tested positive for COVID-19 inform their school. It is up to the school to communicate this to families.

- ◇ How do I know if the COVID-19 cases in my county are high?

The Wisconsin DHS has a dashboard of COVID-19 Activity Level by Region and County that is updated regularly. You can check out what is happening in your community by going to their website [here](#). If you want to find information on your local health department, the Local Public Health website found [here](#) can also help you.

Additional resources for families can be found on our website: [ReSET4kids.org](https://www.reset4kids.org)



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