

A FAMILY GUIDE FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL

DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

As we see the return of Back-to-School displays and school supplies quickly return to the shelves in department stores, the thought of returning to school for the 2020-2021 school term brings on a completely new set of anxiety for families. The purpose of this document is to assist families with navigating the return to school as safely and objectively as possible. Families must be informed, prepared, and ask the right questions to begin the school year with minimal anxiety.

INFORMED FAMILIES KNOW...

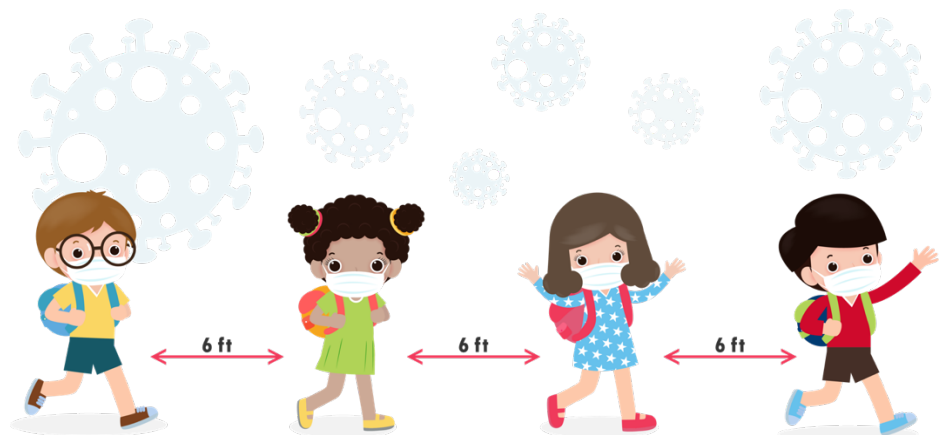
1. MDE Considerations for Reopening

The Mississippi Department of Education has released three options for the reopening of schools ([Considerations for Reopening Schools](#)). School districts will choose one or more of these options for reopening.

2. CDC Guidelines

The CDC has released the following guidelines for schools/childcare centers to follow to create the safest environments for student learning and development.

- Maintain distant between children at 6 feet apart.
- Children will be seated on buses one child per seat using every other seat.
- All staff and students over the age of two years should wear masks.
- Scheduled cleaning of high traffic areas multiple times daily.
- Students should be kept in the same small groups for the duration of the school day.
- Supplies and toys should not be shared among students.
- Meals should be served inside the classroom.



3. Local Resources

Families should visit their local school district or childcare center website frequently to access the most recent information on the reopening of school. Do not be afraid to call or email the site if you have questions about the information you see online.

FAMILIES CAN PREPARE BY...

- **Teaching and modeling children good hygiene practices**

Families should begin taking time to teach and model proper hand washing techniques at home so this will be a healthy habit for children before the start of school. Free handwashing posters are available on the [CDC website](#). Families can print them and display them in their home restroom to further stress the importance of maintaining clean hands to prevent illness. Families should also model properly using a mask. Families should talk about the importance of wearing a mask at all times at school, except meals or snacks.



- **Exploring before and after school care for your children based on their districts chosen schedule**

With school districts implementing different schedule options, families must consider before and aftercare to ensure proper supervision and uninterrupted learning for their children. Space at childcare centers may be limited. Families should also consider extended family, older siblings, or family friends willing to

assist. The goal is to ensure children have a safe daily routine. Before and after school routines are an important factor in reducing stress and anxiety in children.

- **Dealing with separation anxiety and fear**

Many children have been with family members since mid-March. Going back to school can create separation anxiety for many students, especially those in primary grades (PreK-3) and below. This nervousness can be expected to increase during times of trauma or crisis. To prepare children for times they will be separated from family, adults can have discussions with children before they will be away from home for long periods of time. Talk about how long they will be away, but stress the time discussed is an estimate and may be longer or shorter. Families can possibly begin allowing children to accompany them during short errands or shopping trips, while wearing a mask, to get them readjusted safely to public settings.

- **Purchasing and/or making necessary prevention supplies**

While purchasing traditional school supplies, also plan for extra prevention supplies such as hand sanitizer, anti-bacterial soap, cloth facial masks, etc. This [video](#) is a resource for making non-sewn cloth face masks. This can be done as a fun family activity with children.

FAMILIES MUST ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS...

It is natural to have many questions during such a worrying and disruptive time. Below, are helpful questions you may ask. Also, think of follow-up questions you may have. Have these questions nearby while talking to school/childcare staff:

- What steps has the school taken to help ensure the safety of students?
- How will the school support the mental health of students and combat any negative views against people who have been sick?
- How will the school refer children who may need specialized support (mental health, behavioral, extra academic supports)?
- Will any of the school's safeguarding and bullying policies change once schools start to re-open?
- How can I support school safety efforts, including through parent-teacher committees or other networks?

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [Guidance for Schools and Child Care](#) and [Print Resources](#)

[Considerations for Reopening Schools](#)

[Separation Anxiety During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

[What will a return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic look like?](#)
[What parents need to know about school reopening in the age of coronavirus.](#)

[World Health Organization \(WHO\): When and how to use masks.](#)