

COVID-19: RETURNING TO SCHOOL



The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges and changes to daily life, including school. Children with CF and their families may need help navigating these uncertainties this school year. Families can use these tools with their care teams to get the support, information, and guidance they need to better manage school and daily care routines.

8-11-21

States and school districts are making different decisions, which may change throughout the year in response to the pandemic. Ask your school what is currently planned, including steps to control the spread of COVID-19 and how symptoms and infection will be monitored.

COUGHING WITH CF

Coughing for children with CF is critical to getting the thick, sticky mucus out of their lungs. It is not new. What is new, however, is coughing during COVID-19.

- Your child may be more embarrassed about coughing. They may even be teased or bullied about it. Remind them that coughing is good for them. Coach your child on helping others understand why they need to cough.
 - Practice at home with responses like, “I need to cough because I have CF. It is good for me.”
- Some schools require documentation that your child has CF. Reach out to your CF team if your school needs something on file to help them understand which CF symptoms are like COVID-19.
- Documentation may keep the school from sending your child home or being asked to stay out for several days.

MASKING IN SCHOOL

Although masking has been shown to effectively reduce transmission of illness, including COVID-19, some schools and families may approach how to mask differently.

- If your child is one of the few wearing masks at school, they may feel uncomfortable being different. Remind your child that masking helps keep them healthy -- just like coughing, washing their hands and taking enzymes.
 - Practice at home with responses like, “I am wearing my mask to stop spreading germs” or “My parents asked me to keep wearing a mask at school.”
- Remind the school that your child needs to wear a mask to help protect them from germs that could make their CF worse.
- Recruit teachers, other students, and school staff to support your child in helping others understand why your child needs to take these precautions.

NAVIGATING SCHOOL DECISIONS DURING COVID-19

The ongoing pandemic may affect how your family returns to the 2021-2022 school year. Consider the following questions and discuss any concerns with your CF care team.

- Are you concerned that your child is falling behind in school?
- Are you concerned going back to school will impact your child’s mental or physical health?
- Does your child have concerns and/or questions about going back to school?
- Do you feel your child’s school does not understand your concerns or cystic fibrosis?

PREPARING FOR SCHOOL DISCUSSIONS

Use the following to prepare for a discussion with your CF care team or your child's school. Key school staff to talk to may be the school nurse, teacher, counselor, or principal.

- Write out what your child needs at school (i.e., academic, mental/emotional, and physical health).
- Write out the specific questions you have for the CF care team or school.
 - Use the district, state department of education, and CDC's websites for help.
- Think about what matters to you and the level of risk you're comfortable with for your child (e.g., minimizing risk from COVID-19, supporting emotional wellness, and catching up on academic goals). A tool to help you plot this out is the [CF COVID-19 Risk Assessment Tool](#) found on [cff.org](#).
- Has your child been working with a mental health specialist on goals, which could be impacted by school?
- Ask about documents your school may need, such as:
 - Diagnosis letter from your child's CF care team
 - Signed Release of Information form so CF care team can contact your child's school (Most clinics require two-week's notice so give your care team enough time to complete and submit paperwork.)
- Consider grade-specific questions, such as:
 - **Elementary** - How does the teacher like to be contacted? How will they help your child understand their schedule? What is the plan for providing medication should your child need it? Will the school nurse separate students with COVID-19 symptoms from others?
 - **Middle/High School** - What does your child's schedule look like? Who can communicate the plan to the whole team of teachers? Who should you contact when your child is absent? Who should you contact when there is a concern or question? What is the plan for providing medication should your child need it? Will the school nurse separate students with COVID-19 symptoms from others? What information does your child feel comfortable sharing with peers or teachers?
- 504 plans or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can help ensure your child's needs are met. Your CF care team can support you in making these school decisions. [Learn about these plans by visiting \[cff.org\]\(#\)](#).

SCHOOL PLATFORMS DURING COVID-19

Last school year, everyone learned more about what children need to be successful in school and in life. It is unclear what the 2021-2022 school year will look like. **Starting discussions early and keeping communications channels open can make things easier.**

- There were several school options offered during the 2020-2021 school year in response to COVID-19 precautions. Options that may be available (depending on your school district) in the upcoming school year are:
 - **Virtual Learning:** a child can access their school's curriculum online.
 - **Hybrid Learning:** a child can access their curriculum online or through paper handouts, as well as through in-person instruction on specific days of the week.
 - **In-person Learning:** a child can attend school as they typically would.
- To find out what your options are for the 2021-2022 school year, review your district's or school's website. Consider contacting the school principal, counselor, or school district office.
- If you are interested in virtual learning and your school is not offering it, consider these alternatives:
 - Research if your state has a free online school option.

- If your state does not offer a free online option, you may be able to pay for a state-run/public or private option.

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling is when the parent decides and implements what curriculum is being taught. **All parents have the right to withdraw their child from public school to homeschool.**

- Each state has different requirements. Some states require review of the curriculum, participation in standardized testing, and monitoring of progress. Other states do not. Review your state's requirements at the department of education's website.
- Things to consider before starting homeschooling may be:
 - the time needed for a caregiver to plan the curriculum (i.e., what is being taught).
 - the time needed to help your child start and complete school assignments.
 - your work arrangement (i.e., part-time vs. full-time, work from home, or office location, etc.)
 - your comfort level helping your child learn age-appropriate material.

HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION

Homebound Instruction provides educational services to a child who is absent from school due to hospitalization, illness, etc. **Regardless of the option you choose, Homebound Instruction is available to your child if they meet your state's requirements.**

- If a child is going to be away from public school for a prolonged period of time, they may qualify for homebound instruction services because they are not able to access their academic curriculum.
- Your state decides the number of absences and what qualifies for homebound instruction, as well as how many hours of instruction they receive.
- This service applies whether your child is attending in-person, hybrid, or virtual school.
- Talk to your child's school to find out if your child is eligible for homebound instruction and work with your child's CF team to coordinate the required paperwork.

OTHER RESOURCES

For CF-specific COVID-19-related resources, including additional questions and answers about school and how to reduce risk in daily life, visit <https://on.cff.org/COVID-19>

For help with school accommodations contact 844-COMPASS (844-266-7277) or compass@cff.org

School District websites: For information about school platforms, options for your child, and infection control guidelines

State Department of Education websites: For information about school options and requirements in your state