COVID-19 Parent Back to School Recommendations

Please note: This guidance is NOT a substitute for recommendations from a person's primary care provider or other medical staff. The Region 2 Medical Advisory Board based these recommendations on CDC and LDH recommendations. This document will be updated on a semiregular basis, but each link provided will give you the most up to date recommendations.

Things to Consider Before Your Child Goes Back to School in Person

Face Coverings

There are going to be many different changes to the school day due to COVID-19. One of these changes is that students will be required to wear masks while in the school building. To help your student make a smooth transition, we recommend students begin to wear masks outside of school to get used to wearing masks. The correct way to wear a mask is:

- Masks should go over your nose and under your chin
- Masks should cover the mouth and be tight against your cheeks to reduce liquid droplets from getting out.

We recommend all students wear the same solid color cloth mask to ensure that students do not share masks. Students can reuse cloth masks, but the masks should be washed **daily** with soap and warm water. Please remind young students that they should not share masks with other students and should wear their own mask throughout the school day. We also recommend that students wear masks that wrap around their ears and use a lanyard to help students avoid touching and playing with their masks.

Social Distancing

We recommend classrooms be set up to reduce physical interaction between students; please remind younger students at home they should follow these rules while in the classroom, during transitions and other school events.

Hand Washing

We recommend students should be able to wash their hands with soap and water for 20+ seconds or use 60% alcohol hand sanitizer when they first arrive on site, before and after eating, using playground equipment, as well as before they depart. Students should have the opportunity to sanitize their hands as frequently as possible. Hand sanitizer may be kept in student's backpacks and/or pockets if possible to encourage frequent utilization.

Emotional Health

There will be changes in the school day (whether virtual or in person) and to your child's daily routine due to COVID-19. As always, it is important to talk with your child about their concerns and be in contact with their teachers to ensure your child is adjusting to the new school setting. You can find other recommendations on how to reduce the stress of this change on the CDC site.

Other Considerations

It is important that students understand their responsibilities outside of school as well. The safety measures taken at the school won't be effective if large social events are happening in person outside of school hours. Social interaction is very important to everyone, but should be limited in order to slow the spread of COVID-19. When possible, attempt to have students socialize virtually or in small groups where a physical distance of 6 feet can be kept. If socialization needs to occur, it is advised that it occurs outside and in small groups so that potential spread is limited.

Questions to Consider Before Sending Your Child Back to School in Person

- Does your school have a plan to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which includes the four strategies below?
  - Does your school promote things that reduce the spread of COVID-19?
    - Example: social distancing, washing hands and wearing cloth face coverings
  - Does your school create a healthy environment?
    - Example: ensuring proper ventilation, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces
  - Does your school implement healthy operations?
    - Example: staggering schedules, keeping students in small groups
  - Does your school have a plan for when both school staff and students in the classroom test positive for COVID-19 or are exposed to someone who is COVID-19 positive?

- Does your school have the resources need to reopen school?
  - Supplies, staff, and trainings.

- Does your school have a plan that has the right amount of instruction time during the school week?

- Does your school have a plan to communicate with families about changes to the school day as well as the steps they will take if a student or staff member tests positive or is exposed to COVID-19?
  - This includes open communication to discuss parent and guardian concerns and questions.

- Is your child prepared to wear a cloth face covering during extended periods of the day and understands why it is important?

- Does your child has a reliable mode of transportation to/from school? Are you comfortable with the steps being taken to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 on the bus?

- Is your child able to receive the necessary specialized learning or behavior plan even with the changes to the school day? (This is for in person and virtual learning options)

Things to Consider Before Your Child Participates in Virtual Learning

Effects of Screen Time
While there are concerns around children spending too much time in front of a screen, virtual learning alone will not have harmful effects on your child. However, it is important to monitor the amount of time your child spends in front of the screen and what they are doing. You should give your child time to get up and move around. This will limit the amount of time your child is sitting in front of a screen. It is also important to be mindful of the snacks your child is eating in front of a screen. Ultimately, the use of technology for distance learning will not create any health concerns for your child, but you should be mindful of the amount of time they are sitting in front of the screen and how healthy the food is they are eating while in front of the screen.

Brain Breaks
During online learning, it is important that students be given breaks to refresh themselves and reduce burnout. By taking short breaks, students will be better prepared to focus on their school work during the school day. These breaks can be for the length of a song (3 to 4 minutes) and is a good time for students to get up and move around. Even if it is just standing up and stretching behind their chair, this movement will help break up the amount of time they are sitting in one place in front of a screen.

Social Interaction

In order to replace some of the social interaction lost because students are not in school, you can attempt to allow students to safely interact with their friends outside of the virtual learning environment. This could be through technology such as Zoom or outside where your child can interact with their friends while staying 6 feet or more apart.

Questions to Consider Before Your Child Participates in Virtual Learning

- Are you able to supervise your child or have someone else supervise your child while they are in school?

- Do you have access to reliable internet and a device for your child to use? If not, are you able to get a computer from your school? Are you able to get access to affordable internet?

- Do you have a space where your child will not be distracted while they are doing their school work during virtual learning classes/assignments?

- Does your school provide an opportunity for your child to interact with an instructor in real time through virtual learning?

- Will your child's learning style and needs be met if they engage in virtual learning? Will your child be able to keep up with assignments in a virtual format? This would also include your child's social needs and whether or not they will be met while in a virtual format.

- Will your child be able to receive services that they would normally get if they were in school in person? These services should be provided by your child's school even in a virtual format.
  They include but are not limited to:
  - Nutrition services, more information can be found here, specialized resources can be found on your specific school site
  - Behavioral services including social skills training, occupational therapy, and speech/language therapy
  - Emotional/mental services

- Is your child's school continuing after school programs or clubs in a virtual format?

Other Information to Consider

COVID-19 Information

We know that COVID-19 is spread through droplets that enter the air when someone who has COVID-19 breathes, coughs, or sneezes. According to a study done here in the Baton Rouge region, more than 50% of people who have COVID-19 have no symptoms and may not know they are COVID-19 positive. As a result we are in an agreement with the CDC about the importance of practicing social distancing, wear a mask or face covering, washing hands, and disinfect surfaces are extremely important in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Other Considerations
While steps are being taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the school setting, it is important that families follow healthy habits while they are outside of the school setting. Families should: wear masks when they are out in public, practice social distancing, limit social gatherings (parties and get togethers), and wash their hands in order to reduce the risk of being exposed and spreading COVID-19 while at school. When everyone does their part to help reduce the number of people who have COVID-19 in the community it helps reduce the chance of COVID-19 spreading in schools.

Students with Exceptionalities
If your child has an Individual Health Plan (IHP) you may need update them because of COVID-19. Parents should contact their child's doctor for specific guidance if their child has a serious medical problem. You should also make sure that your child's teachers, nurses and other staff members in the school know that your child has a chronic health condition so they can take extra precautions around your child.

Students with significant disabilities may have more difficulty in telling caregivers when they don't feel well. Specific symptoms such as sore throat, "feeling bad" or loss of taste/smell may be especially difficult for a child with developmental delays/disabilities to describe. You should be in communication with your child's teacher, and staff should remain alert for changes in behavior, appetite, sleepiness or other signs that may indicate early symptoms of illness. Cough, difficulty breathing, and fever should be judged as one would for any child.

If your child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan you may want to reach out to your school to update the plan. These are some thing you should consider:
- Federal disability laws allow for flexibility in determining how to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities.
- You should work with your child's teacher administrators to identify ways to creatively meet the needs of your child with disabilities.
- If your child receives any type of therapy, you should see if they can be provided via telehealth whenever possible to ensure your child with disabilities continue to receive their valuable services.

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing:
- You may want to ask your IEP team if your teacher can use a face masks with clear plastic cut-outs so their lips can be seen. A clear plastic face shield has shone not to be as effective.
- You should also ensure that any videos or streaming that will be required for students to include closed captions.

Students with visual impairments:
- You should ask your IEP team for additional instruction that may be needed to address your child with vision loss or blindness.

Emotional Health of Students
Social (physical) distance is not social isolation – we recommend kids have a chance to interact with other kids, but in a safe way. We also recommend students both in school and home should practice mindfulness exercises that may be helpful (allow for time to process/relax during the day), as children may experience extra stress because of COVID-19. We recommend keeping an open line of communication with your child's teacher when it comes to the emotional health of your child.

COVID-19 Back to School Resources

CDC
- School Decision-Making Tool for Parents, Caregivers, and Guardians
- Back to School Planning: Checklists to Guide Parents

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)
- LDOE Strong Start 2020 Louisiana's Plan website
- LDOE School Reopening Guidelines and Resources
- LDH K-12 Guidance and Resource website
- LDOE Parent Resources for COVID-19

Louisiana Department of Health
- COVID-19 Reporting Resources for Schools
- LDH COVID-19 Contact Tracing in Schools (updated 9/10/20)

Local School Districts
- EBRPSS Reopening Blueprint
- City of Baker School System Return-To-School Plan Strong Start 2020
- Zachary Community Schools Strong Start 2020
- Central Community School System Strong Start Return to School Plan

You can find information and resources regarding COVID-19:
www.brla.gov/coronavirus

You can find information and resources regarding education:
https://www.brla.gov/2230/COVID-19-Education