



Medical professionals: staying home when sick or exposed is key to keeping schools open

Officials urge parents to take attendance and stay-at-home guidance seriously, have a back-up plan

With school officially underway across the state of Minnesota, medical professionals are urging parents to be informed and aware of the guidelines for when their children can attend or need to stay home from school or child care. The COVID-19 attendance and exclusion guidance for school, child care and youth programming lays out a number of scenarios and appropriate steps for children, students, or staff.

“Staying home when you feel sick or have been exposed are some of the best defenses we have against COVID-19. The exclusion guidance helps people understand when they need to keep their children home from school or child care,” said Kris Ehresmann, infectious disease director at Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). “Whether it’s parents and families, or teachers and child care staff, the attendance and exclusion guidance and home screening tool is a proven prevention method to stop spread in our child cares and schools.”

Ehresmann says MDH collaborated with the Minnesota Medical Association and the Minnesota chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, to develop this guidance. First published earlier in the year, it was refined in late summer ahead of the start of the fall school year.

“The biggest thing we want people to understand is that any Minnesotan – including children – who has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 needs to stay home for a minimum of 14 days,” continued Ehresmann. “You can’t test out of quarantine after an exposure. There’s no way to shorten the incubation period. So how you spend your time outside of school has a direct impact on your ability to attend school in-person.”

For those who do not know if they have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, but are feeling sick – this guidance provides direction on when to stay home and for how long based on symptoms.

MDH tracks all cases where an individual attended a child care, school, or other youth setting prior to testing positive for COVID-19. Of those licensed child care centers, certified centers, summer day camps, and school-age care programs with cases that were operating prior to the start of the school year, 70% only had one confirmed case.

“Our experience in child care over the summer has shown how effective these actions can be to keep kids healthy and centers in operation,” said Susan Klammer, lead epidemiologist for child care and schools. “We know it’s not easy for parents – or our students – who suddenly need to keep their children home for up to two weeks but it is a proven tool to help prevent spread and keep all of us safe. This will be critical to keeping children with the opportunity to learn in-person in our schools.”

“Pediatricians and medical leaders worked with MDH on the guidance, and we are grateful for the partnership,” said Dr. Singh, chair of pediatrics for Park Nicollet and co-lead of the HealthPartners and Park Nicollet Children’s Health Initiative. “As a board member with the Minnesota chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a practicing pediatrician, I stand by this guidance. As a mom of two school-aged children, I know personally that this is not easy on families to adjust to these disruptions and try to balance work, but this fall and winter is going to look different. We have to work together – doctors, public health, and most of all families – to keep our children, their beloved child care and school staff, and our communities safe.”

Many schools across the state are operating on a hybrid model of some in-person instruction and some distance learning, while others are opening with a totally in-person or distance learning model. In just the first opening weeks, school officials are already reporting issues of families feeling confused and hearing conflicting messages on when their kids can attend in-person.

"We really need families to take the guidance on when to stay home seriously," said Deb Mehr, president of the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota. "School nurses, administrators, teachers, and staff, -- we're all here to be your partner in keeping everyone safe. But when families disregard the guidance, it puts our school communities in a difficult place, and ultimately can lead to more exposure and more spread. It's important that we all work together this school year to prioritize the health and safety of our students and school staff."

The [COVID-19 Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth, and Child Care Programs \(PDF\)](#) includes a full list of the more common and less common symptoms associated with COVID-19, as well as guidance for individuals and their siblings or household contacts. MDH has also developed two additional parent-friendly resources to help navigate when children should stay home:

- [COVID-19 Attendance Guide for Parents and Families \(PDF\)](#) - Guide for parents and families to understand when children can attend school, youth programs, and child care during COVID-19.
- [Home Screening Tool for COVID-19 Symptoms \(PDF\)](#) - Home screening tool for parents and guardians related to COVID-19.

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