



## Return to Learn: Reopening Iowa’s Schools Safely and Responsibly

### Purpose

This guidance was written by the Iowa Department of Education (Department) in consultation with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and is intended to help districts (1) determine when to use each of the Return-to-Learn models they have planned for during the 2020-2021 school year, and (2) handle potential and/or confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools. This guidance should be read in conjunction with prior guidance on [Return-to-Learn supports](#), [Senate File 2310](#), and [Reopening Guidance](#). Please consult the Department’s [Return-to-Learn Google site](#) for the latest supports for schools. In addition, always refer to the latest information from IDPH on their [COVID-19 site](#).

### Which of my approved Return-to-Learn models should I use?

The health, safety, and well-being of students, teachers, staff and their families is the most important consideration in determining whether temporary transitions to alternate learning models or school closures are necessary. The Iowa Departments of Education and Public Health, and local public health officials, will assist schools and districts with transitions based on the following criteria and conditions in their respective communities. The following table summarizes the levels of community transmission schools may observe and, for each, suggested mitigation strategies that align with current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and IDPH guidance, and appropriate Return-to-Learn models.

Community Transmission	Suggested Strategies	Return-to-Learn Model(s)
<p><b>None to Minimal</b></p> <p>0-5% positivity in county on average over the past 14 days</p> <p><i>* Healthcare resources remain stable</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay home if you are sick or exposed to someone confirmed to have COVID-19</li> <li>Practice frequent hand-washing</li> <li>Stay 6 feet from others as much as possible</li> <li>Use face coverings when able to do so safely and correctly</li> <li>Maintain frequent cleaning schedule using EPA-approved cleaning products</li> <li>Monitor absenteeism among teachers, staff, and students</li> </ul>	<p>On-Site Learning following DOE, IDPH and CDC guidance.</p> <p>Hybrid Learning as necessary based on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent or guardian preference</li> <li>Student quarantine</li> </ul>

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Community Transmission	Suggested Strategies	Return-to-Learn Model(s)
<p><b>Minimal to Moderate</b></p> <p>6-14% positivity in a county on average over the past 14 days</p> <p><i>* Healthcare resources remain stable</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue above strategies</li> <li>• Reduce group events/gatherings</li> <li>• Limit inter-school interactions</li> <li>• Ensure student and staff groupings/cohorts are as static as possible and that interactions among groups of students and staff are limited</li> </ul>	<p>On-Site Learning following DOE, IDPH and CDC guidance.</p> <p>Hybrid Learning as necessary based on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent or guardian preference</li> <li>• Student quarantine</li> </ul>
<p><b>Substantial Controlled</b></p> <p>15-20% positivity in a county on average over the past 14 days AND 10% absenteeism among students expected for in-person learning</p> <p><i>* Healthcare resources remain stable</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue above strategies</li> <li>• Consider regular health checks for any on-site students/staff if feasible</li> <li>• Cancel school events/gatherings</li> <li>• Close communal spaces (e.g., cafeterias, media centers)</li> </ul>	<p>Hybrid Learning as necessary based on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent or guardian preference</li> <li>• Student quarantine</li> </ul> <p>Temporary Continuous/Remote Learning for an entire school building or district for up to 14 days may be requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please contact the Department of Education by submitting your information via the CASA system.</li> <li>• Only the Departments of Education and Public Health can make the determination and provide temporary authorization to move to 100% online or remote learning.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Substantial Uncontrolled</b></p> <p>&gt;20% positivity in a county on average over the past 14 days with healthcare resource capacity concerns</p>	<p>State and local education and public health officials should work closely together to make decisions on school operations.</p>	<p>Temporary Continuous/Remote Learning for an entire school building or district for up to 14 days may be requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please contact the Department of Education by submitting your information via the CASA system.</li> <li>• Only the Departments of Education and Public Health can make this determination and provide temporary authorization to move to 100% online or remote learning.</li> </ul>

\*Your local public health department uses data to determine the level of community transmission. Most districts in Iowa are in 2-4 counties, so it is important to know which public health departments you work with and how to contact them. The highest positivity rate in any county that a district is a part of should be considered.

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## Evaluating Sick Students and Staff

Students or staff members should remain home when sick. Students or staff members with **any** high-risk symptom or **two or more** low risk symptoms should stay home and are advised to seek an evaluation by a health care provider.

High Risk Symptoms	Low Risk Symptoms
New cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, new loss of taste or smell	Fever, headache, muscle and body aches, fatigue, sore throat, runny nose, congestion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

## Evaluation by Health Care Provider

Negative COVID-19 Test	Alternative Diagnosis	Positive COVID-19 Test
Return to school after 24 hours with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) <b>and</b> symptoms improving	Return to school after 24 hours with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) <b>and</b> symptoms improving	Return to school after 24 hours with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) <b>and</b> symptoms improving <b>and</b> 10 days since symptoms started

## Identifying Close Contacts for COVID-19 Cases

Close Contact: Individuals who've been within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes with a positive COVID-19 case during the infectious period. Contact may occur in a classroom, lunchroom, free period, during transportation to or from school, at practices or games, and during extracurricular activities.

School will	Public Health will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notify local public health department</li> <li>Identify close contacts and quarantine exposed students and staff</li> <li>Notify appropriate school administration, families and staff (without identifying the COVID-19 case)</li> <li>Provide Public Health with list of close contacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommend quarantine for all household contacts of COVID-19 case</li> <li>Work with school to determine which students and staff should be quarantined</li> </ul>

Students	Staff	Individuals Previously Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If no symptoms develop, students can return to school 14 days from their last contact with the COVID-19 case</li> <li>If symptoms develop, students should be evaluated by a health care provider.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff may be considered critical personnel and can be allowed to return to work if there are staffing shortages as long as they remain asymptomatic.</li> <li>Staff should take their temperature and screen for symptoms at the start and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Those who have been previously diagnosed positive for COVID-19 within the past 12 weeks, and were exposed to a COVID-19 case, do not need to quarantine.</li> </ul>

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Students	Staff	Individuals Previously Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If a student tests positive for COVID-19, they should isolate for 10 days.</li> <li>If a student tests negative for COVID-19, they must still complete their 14-day quarantine before returning to school.</li> </ul>	<p>end of each day, and wear a mask at work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If symptoms develop, they must isolate immediately.</li> </ul>	

[What information do I need to submit in my application for Temporary Permission to Provide Primarily Continuous/Remote Learning?](#)

The Department will ask you to provide the following information:

- Evidence of consultation with local/county public health determining that the area meets the requirements established by IDPH.
- If the application for temporary permission is approved:
  - How will the district or accredited nonpublic school ensure that all students with IEPs are provided with FAPE during the time the district/school is providing services primarily online?
  - How will the district or accredited nonpublic school ensure that students who require mental health or health services still have access to these services during the time the district/school is providing services primarily online?
  - How will the district or accredited nonpublic school ensure that students with 504 plans continue to receive services?
  - How will the district continue to provide meals to students?
  - How will the district provide access to instructional materials and services for students who do not have access to the internet?
  - What process will you use to communicate with parents/families on educational services and changes in delivery models?

[How quickly will the Departments of Education and Public Health respond to my application for Temporary Permission to Provide Primarily Continuous/Remote Learning?](#)

You will receive a response within 48 hours, not including weekends.

This plan is fluid and subject to change as more information becomes available. The Department will release an FAQ to supplement this information. If you have questions, please contact your [school improvement consultant](#).