

FACT

Back to School - Keeping Kids Safe During COVID-19

The start of the new school year can be a taxing time for parents, and with COVID-19 cases surging again, this year's back to school activities are proving even more stressful than normal. Many are wondering how to best protect their kids' physical health in the classroom, while also ensuring they get the education and social skills they need. It is no easy feat, but fortunately, there are resources available to help navigate this difficult time.

FACT: After a year without in-person instruction, it's time for kids to return to the classroom. Despite the increased chance of infection posed by the Delta variant, the risks to students from school closures is too big to ignore. The damages we're seeing from keeping schools closed over the last year include "virtual dropouts," food insecurity, safety, and adverse impacts on social, physical and mental health, among others. Allowing students to return to school will help prevent these serious issues from persisting. In the meantime, there are also many steps we can take to protect their health and safety in the classroom.

FACT: Masks work, and they are needed in schools now, more than ever before. Face masks that cover the nose and mouth should be worn by everyone over 2 years old, as they have proven effective at slowing the spread of COVID-19. This simple, proven tool provides particularly important protection for young students who are unable to get the vaccine yet. When buying or making your child's face mask, make sure it fits snugly against the sides of their face, is secured with ties or ear loops, includes multiple layers of fabric, allows for breathing without restriction, and is able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

FACT: Masks will not harm your kids. Properly-fitting and correctly-worn face masks are effective and safe to wear for long periods of time, such as during the school day. The vast majority of kids, even those with medical conditions, are able to safely and effectively wear face masks. Practicing and role-modeling the importance of masks with your kids greatly improves their ability and willingness to mask up safely.

FACT: COVID-19 is the real major threat to students. The Delta variant changed the circumstances for school-aged children, particularly for those too young to be vaccinated. Delta's much higher viral load and transmission rate is causing more kids to get sick and, also, to spread the virus to others. The number of pediatric COVID-19 patients continues to rise dramatically, as the Delta variant spreads throughout the Gulf South. More children are hospitalized with COVID-19 now than ever before. Until a majority of those in our communities are vaccinated, we must continue to implement these safety measures in our schools.

FACT: Masking, social distancing and hand hygiene are key to protecting students in the classroom. Aside from face masks, social distancing and maintaining proper hand hygiene are two of the best ways we can prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends school students should be at least three feet apart. You can impart good hand hygiene to your kids by teaching them to scrub with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, making sure to get the back of their hands, between their fingers and under their nails. You can also teach them to measure the time by singing Happy Birthday twice.

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Schedule your vaccination appointment on the MyChart portal today. Visit ochsnerlsuhs.org/vaccine for more facts, or call **844-888-2772** with any additional questions. For more COVID-19 information and resources, visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov) or the Louisiana Department of Health (ldh.la.gov) website.