

Priorities for a Safe Return to In-Person School for Children with Complex Health Needs

Children with complex health needs have serious medical conditions and often rely on medical devices or people to help them with daily activities.

Safe in-person school attendance can be hard because these children are at higher risk of severe COVID-19, their daily care can include high-risk procedures, and physical distancing and mask adherence can be difficult.

The unique circumstances facing children with complex health needs require extra attention to support safe in-person school attendance.

In Spring 2021, 460 Wisconsin families, school staff, and clinicians sent us over 1,100 ideas on how to help these children attend school during the pandemic.

The top 10 ideas shown below were prioritized by a team of 35 experts representing families, schools, clinicians and policymakers across Wisconsin.

As a central principle, the safety of children with complex health needs requires the safety of all children and staff at school. **Families of children with complex health needs should be supported to make the best decision for their child** with their health care providers and school staff when considering the risks of COVID-19.

460

families, school staff, & clinicians submitted ideas

1,100+

ideas were received

35

experts reviewed & prioritized the ideas



PREVENT

- Encourage all school staff who work in close proximity with children with complex health needs to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and wear a mask whether vaccinated or not.
- Ensure a respiratory protection plan is in place for school staff performing high-risk care, such as aerosol-generating procedures (e.g. tracheostomy suctioning, nebulized treatments, etc.). For those staff, that would include N95 mask fit testing or availability of Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR).
- Assign and maintain individual seats for children with complex health needs during transportation to and from school.



PREPARE

- Educate school staff and families about the increased health risks of contracting COVID-19 for children with complex health needs.
- Discuss COVID-19 mitigations strategies for children with complex health needs in Individualized Education Plan meetings. Specifically, develop plans that outline the child's daily routines and contingency plans which account for COVID-19 safety.
- Ensure that each child with complex health needs has their own medical equipment or single use disposable equipment at school.
- Plan to provide COVID-19 testing for staff and students at school.



PARTNER

- Partner with health care providers about ways to keep each child with complex health needs safe at school and circumstances in which a child should stay home.
- Have at least one medical staff available to address acute COVID-19 symptoms or questions.



ADAPT

- Provide families of children with complex health needs with the opportunity to change between in-person and virtual or homebound school based on illness or COVID-19 spread.

Experts also endorsed important recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and American Academy of Pediatrics:

- Promoting vaccination for all eligible students, families and school staff.
- Encouraging consistent and correct mask use, particularly when indoors.
- Facilitating/practicing cleaning and disinfecting practices, physical distancing, adequate ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette.
- Participating in screening, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine as indicated.
- Staying home when sick and getting tested.



Learn more at
reset4kids.org

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