



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

August 6, 2020

Dear Educators:

Mississippi is facing the unprecedented challenge of providing quality education to K-12 students while navigating the dangers of COVID-19 in the community. Unfortunately, Mississippi is experiencing a peak for COVID-19 transmission at the same time we are trying to get children and teenagers back in class. It will be a monumental challenge to keep COVID outbreaks from undermining the educational process and to keep school-based outbreaks from driving additional community transmission. Please see our current recommendations for safely educating our K-12 students.

MSDH Recommendations for Returning to School

- 1) Please see our guide for safer return to the classroom. This document is a tool for mitigating risk and maximizing student safety in the school and classroom environment. <https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/static/14,21866,420.html#schools>
- 2) All students and faculty should wear masks (or cloth face coverings) at all times as defined by the Governor's Executive Order 1517. This order applies to public and private schools.
- 3) Students and faculty should remain >6 feet apart during meals or break times. Break times in the work environment are vulnerable times for the spread of COVID. Please help your faculty members keep their guard up at all times.
- 4) Virtual Learning: Ideally all students and parents should have the option for virtual learning. This will allow family members with vulnerable household members or children with medical issues to avoid exposures in the school setting.
- 5) Delaying In-Person Classes: MSDH supports the delay of in-person classes at least until August 17, 2020 for schools that have not yet opened. This is especially recommended for teens and pre-teens and for communities with widespread community transmission. Mississippi is experiencing very high levels of transmission in local communities. Although there are no guarantees that transmission will decrease in the near future, some evidence suggests a recent moderation in spread.
- 6) Education Based on Age: Current evidence demonstrates that teens and pre-teens can contract and spread COVID as efficiently as young adults. Younger children (≤ 10) appear to transmit the disease less frequently. **Prioritizing in-person education for younger students** and virtual education (or partially virtual) for older students are valid strategies for limiting the risk of outbreaks.
- 7) Reducing Class Size: When resuming in-person class, we recommend limiting class sizes to 50% or less of room capacity when possible. This can be achieved through a combination of virtual learning, hybrid learning, staggered scheduling and moving classes to larger spaces.

Thank you all for your diligent and thoughtful preparations. We will all face considerable challenges over the next several months.

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