



Return to School for Youth with Special Healthcare Needs

Key Questions and Considerations for Families

Return to school for youth with special healthcare needs

The decisions of schools and daycares to hold in-person learning – versus other alternatives – will appropriately be related to their own decision-making regarding their local circumstances and resources. The decision of families with youth with special healthcare needs as to how their child will participate in their education is a personal and individual decision-making process as well. The following are some questions to help families with this decision.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, children who are medically complex, who have serious genetic, neurologic, metabolic disorders, and with congenital (since birth) heart disease might be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Similar to adults, children with obesity, diabetes, asthma and chronic lung disease, or immunosuppression might be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Parents, caregivers and families should talk with their child's doctor and school to assess their unique needs and make an informed choice that best suits their family's circumstances.

Questions to discuss with your child's doctor

Evaluating risk of my child and our home caregiving system:

- Does my child have any of the underlying conditions and risks associated with higher transmission/more severe forms of the disease?
- Does my child's particular regime of medications and/or feeding put them at higher risk of exposure?
- Does my child's age make a difference for their risk?
- If my child is non-ambulatory, what are the special COVID-19 related challenges at school for them?
- Am I able to care for my child safely in the home given the demands of my job and my own health?
- Would my child's exposure to the virus at school pose risks to my/my family's health and ability to care for my child safely in the home?

Questions to discuss with your child's school

Evaluating my school's plan for in-person instruction:

- What is the school's plan for minimizing exposure to children with special medical needs? (Bubbles, limitations on numbers of students in spaces, consistent assignments of 1:1's etc.)
- How will the school mitigate risk when students are unable to wear masks?
- Does my child require substantial physical support during the course of the day (i.e., frequent position changes, use of durable medical equipment) and if so, how will those supports be delivered in a way that conforms with the COVID protocols of the school?
- How will personal care, including toileting and diapering, be managed in the school setting?
- For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, will the teachers & staff be masked in ways that allow full communication?

Evaluating my school's plan for remote instruction:

- How will my child's IEP/504 plan be amended to accommodate remote learning? What impact will this remote plan have on their IEP/504? (this is a trick question—there should be NO changes to the underlying IEP/504 during this time of remote instruction)
- How will my child receive instruction that allows them to access the curriculum?
- What provisions have been made for deaf or hard of hearing and visually-impaired students?
- What are the options in my school district for home-bound instruction and therapy?
- What can the school provide by way of adaptive equipment to access computers, tablets, and the like?
- Will the school provide educator and/or paraprofessional "live" engagement for remote learners?
- Will there be opportunities for social/emotional learning and peer engagement for remote learners?

For a list of COVID-19 resources for families with youth with special healthcare needs, visit www.luriechildrens.org/COVID-19