

UW Health: Pediatricians offer guidance on a safe return to school this fall

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MADISON, Wis. – As the new school year approaches, UW Health pediatricians are sharing their recommendations on how students can return to in-person instruction safely amid rising COVID-19 cases. Many school districts in Wisconsin are in the process of finalizing policies on everything from facility cleaning to distancing to mask wearing, and UW Health’s pediatricians believe in-person learning is best for kids and the proper infection control process should make kids, parents and teachers confident about a safe school year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics are trusted sources for the best practices to keep kids safe, and these two organizations agree on back-to-school recommendations for the fall, which should reassure families, says Dr. Gregory DeMuri, pediatric infectious diseases specialist, UW Health, and professor of pediatrics at University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

“We have learned so much in the past year and we have so much more data to guide our decisions going forward,” said DeMuri. “Now that we have this information, it is our job to use what we’ve learned. If we do that, kids can return to school and near normal activities.”

Both organizations agree students benefit from in-person learning and safely returning to in-person instruction this fall is the top priority. Some key recommendations include:

- Masking for students, teachers and staff K-12 regardless of vaccination status.

Studies have shown that universal masking has been an incredibly effective tool for controlling the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Universal masking can allow schools to largely operate normally. In fact, if children are exposed to COVID-19 in a fully masked environment, they do not need to quarantine.

- Maintaining 3 feet of distance between people when possible. Distancing can be reduced in the classroom or on the bus when everyone is masked.
- Vaccinations for students (12 and older), teachers and staff. Vaccines are extremely effective and have been extensively tested to show that they are safe.
- Good hand washing and proper respiratory etiquette such as covering a cough or sneeze.
- Staying home when you are sick.