

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19: Return to elementary school or daycare for children with underlying health conditions

Elementary schools and daycares are gradually reopening as the confinement measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted. The return to school remains voluntary and at the parents' discretion. If your child has an underlying health condition, it is only natural that you would have questions and concerns about this return.

The following recommendations are intended to help you make your decision as elementary schools and daycares reopen this spring.

Recommendations by the Directeur National de Santé Publique's (DNSP)

The DNSP and many Quebec paediatric and public health experts are in favour of a return to an educational environment for most children with a chronic illness. For more vulnerable children, it may be wise to wait a few weeks before returning their educational environment, to allow the school or daycare to finish making adjustments. For some children with more serious underlying conditions as described below, it might be preferable to delay the return to class.

To date, in Quebec and other countries, children who have contracted COVID-19 most often have mild illness and are rarely hospitalized. There have been a small number of severe cases in children, sometimes in children with underlying chronic conditions. Very few children who have contracted COVID-19 around the world have died. Children derive many health and developmental benefits from attending school or daycare.

There is still very little scientific data on how COVID-19 affects children with a chronic illness but for now, they do not seem at greater risk for infection or hospitalization from COVID-19. Nevertheless, it seems likely that children at risk of complications from the usual viral infections (influenza, etc.) are at greater risk of complications from a COVID-19 infection.

Children at risk of serious complications

Children with a medical condition serious enough to require frequent follow-up at a hospital centre may be at greater risk of developing complications if they contract COVID-19. These include children with a serious heart or respiratory disease or severe immunosuppression. If that is the case for your child, it would be wise to discuss the

possibility of delaying your child's return to school or daycare with his or her attending physician. Other serious or complex health problems could increase the risk of complications regardless of the underlying condition, for example, for a child who needed to go to intensive care for the common cold. If in doubt, don't hesitate to consult your child's attending physician or health care team for help with making your decision.

Siblings of the child with the chronic illness

In most cases, there is no need to delay returning the child's siblings to the school or daycare. They generally attend school in the fall and winter when many viruses are circulating. If before the pandemic the attending physician of the child with the underlying condition believed that the child's siblings could go to school or daycare, the same recommendation would likely be made under the current circumstances.

However, in the following situations, it is **recommended that you consult your child's attending physician** regarding his or her sibling's return to school or daycare (mainly those under the age of 12), because it might be preferable to delay this return:

- your child has severe immunosuppression (ex., he or she is undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy for cancer or a transplant, etc.);
- your child has a serious heart condition (ex., heart failure, cyanosis). Consult the En cœur website of the Fondation québécoise pour les enfants avec maladies du cœur at: <https://en-coeur.org/covid19/>;
- any other complex medical situation requiring regular follow-up at a hospital.

In general, these parents have already been advised of these recommendations by the child's attending physician.

Asthma

If your child is asthmatic but his or her condition has been well controlled, ideally for at least three months, he or she may return to school or daycare while continuing to follow his or her regular treatment plan continuously (including during summer). This is also the case if your child is taking cortisone by inhalation.

Contact your child's attending physician before returning him or her to an educational environment if:

- your child has been hospitalized in intensive care for an asthma attack in the past year;

- in the past three months, his or her asthma was not well controlled and required many urgent medical consultations or taking cortisone by mouth or injection.
- your child's asthma is not under control even if he or she is taking the prescribed treatment.

Additional Information

- Government of Québec: [Québec.ca/coronavirus](https://quebec.ca/coronavirus)
- CHU Sainte-Justine: Deconfinement - Returning to Daycare and School – Questions and Answers <https://www.chusj.org/fr/soins-services/C/COVID-19/deconfinement>.