

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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

Elementary schools or secondary schools and daycares are gradually reopening as the confinement measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted. If your child has an underlying health condition, it is only normal that you would have questions and concerns about this return.

The following recommendations are intended to help you make your decision about the safe return of children with an underlying health condition, in a school environment, in the fall of 2020.

Recommendations by the Directeur National de Santé Publique (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, in certain specific cases of more serious underlying health conditions described below, it may be advisable to postpone 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 is safe to assume that children at risk of complications from the usual viral infections (influenza, etc.) are likely to have 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, due to the underlying health condition. These include, for example, children with a serious heart or respiratory disease or severe immunosuppression.

If that is the case for your child, it would be prudent to have your child assessed by his attending physician before considering his return to school or daycare.

Other serious or complex health problems could also increase the risk of complications regardless of the underlying condition, for example, for a child who has been hospitalized in 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.

Depending on your child's situation, your doctor may recommend that you encourage your child to return to daycare or school with certain additional measures. This option may be preferable for the overall well-being of your child rather than being absent from school for several months or the entire school year. Examples of such measures are:

- Use a medical-type mask rather than a face covering;
- Avoid gatherings when possible (during lunch, transport or in school);
- Choose extracurricular activities where distancing is easier to apply.

Siblings of the child with the chronic illness

In general, the parents concerned are already notified of these recommendations by the child's attending physician. 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 attend school or daycare, the same recommendation would likely be made under the current circumstances.

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. This is also the case if your child is taking cortisone by inhalation (pump).

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;

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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