



Reopening and Public Health Frequently Asked Questions

Purpose

These are the most frequently asked questions (FAQ) related to school reopening guidance and the criteria set by Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) released on July 30, 2020. This FAQ (updated on 9-29-20) is meant to be read in conjunction with the [original Return to Learn: Reopening Iowa's Schools Safely and Responsibly guidance](#) and companion charts: [Reopening Iowa's Schools Safely and Responsibly](#) and [Evaluating Sick Students and Staff: Reopening Iowa](#), as well as prior guidance on Return-to-Learn supports, Senate File 2310, and Reopening guidance. Please consult the Department's [Return-to-Learn Google site](#) for the latest supports for schools. In addition, always refer to the latest information from IDPH on their [COVID-19 site](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Are schools required to use the respective delivery model associated with each community transmission parameter or are these recommendations?

No. The table on pages 1-2 within the [original guidance](#) provides recommendations based on the information we have right now from public health experts. Schools should use an approved delivery model that is compliant with the law and part of their Return-to-Learn plan within these recommendations.

Can districts choose to implement a hybrid model at any level of community transmission?

Yes. As long as the model complies with the requirement to offer at least 50% of core instruction in-person, districts can offer a hybrid model even with low community transmission rates.

Can parents choose any hybrid model they would like to use?

No. Parents can only choose from the models offered by their district. Parents cannot create their own hybrid model.

How will positivity rates be determined for school districts that are in more than one county?

The highest positivity rate in any county that a district is a part of should be considered.

How is the positivity rate calculated? Is it for the whole county or just for ages 17 and younger?

The positivity rate is the number of positive tests divided by the number of tests performed. It is for the entire county, not a restricted age range.

Where can I find the positivity rate for my county?

The positivity rate for each county can be found at <https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/pages/case-counts>. The state level data can be filtered to a county by clicking on the county in the map.

Will districts be required to monitor the 14-day average positivity rate or is this something that the county public health department will notify a district when the positivity rate exceeds 15% or 20%?

Districts will need to check their own positivity rate at <https://coronavirus.iowa.gov/pages/case-counts>. The 15-20% is a threshold for when a school could close, not necessarily that it should. Districts should work with state and local public health to determine the best course given situations locally.

How many school districts are in more than one county?

237 school districts are in more than one county. 90 school districts are in just one county.

Does a county positivity rate need to be above 20% for a district to request to move to primarily remote learning?

No. The thresholds under which we recommend the option to apply to move to temporary remote instruction is a community transmission rate between 15-20% positivity, on average, over the last 14 days and a student absenteeism rate among students learning in-person of 10% or more ([Iowa School Absenteeism Reporting, IDPH, Reporting Form](#), 2020). A district may apply without meeting these thresholds and the application will still be considered.

Revised (9-29-20) How should the absenteeism rate be calculated? Should it only include ill students, or should it also include students who are in quarantine/isolation or any kind of absence?

Districts should continue to record official attendance in their student information systems (SIS) as they would in any year, marking students absent when they are not present for instruction. This means that students learning remotely would be considered present.

Official attendance is one type of data that can be used by the district to determine absenteeism rates for the purpose of requesting permission to temporarily move to primarily remote learning. However, the district may choose to *additionally* include all COVID-19 related absenteeism from in-person instruction, such as students who are in quarantine or isolation and are required to learn remotely when they normally would have attended in-person, in their request if it is important in their context.

Please see the Department's [guidance on Attendance and Absenteeism](#) for more information.

How will districts apply for permission to move to temporary remote learning?

An application is available in the Consolidated Accountability and Support Application (CASA) system. The application includes the option for the district to apply district-wide or only for a specific school(s).

If we apply for permission to move to temporary remote learning, what should we do while waiting for a response from the Departments of Education and Public Health?

We will respond to all requests as soon as possible, but please make the best decision in the interest of staff and student safety while you wait for our response. If a district or nonpublic school needs to close for up to 48 hours while waiting for a response, this time will not need to be made up to reach the minimum instructional time requirements in Iowa Code 279.10.

Do we need permission to close a classroom or wing of a building?

No. Districts and nonpublic schools may decide to close one or more classrooms or a section of a building without obtaining permission from the Department. We recommend that you make these decisions in consultation with your local public health departments.

Revised (9-29-20) If our district or nonpublic school moves to 100% online or remote learning can we still offer extracurricular activities?

No. All in-person activities and practices would need to be suspended during the period of 100% remote learning. Offering in-person activities would be incompatible with the goal of mitigating higher rates of virus transmission. Extracurricular activities could still be conducted virtually.

If a family chooses 100% online or remote learning is the student still eligible for extracurricular activities?

Any otherwise eligible student remains academically eligible. A district may, at their discretion, determine that a request to participate in in-person extracurricular activities is inconsistent with the claim that the student could not attend school in-person.

Will the Department be releasing decision-making guidelines for closure or changing delivery models in case of staff shortages due to infection rates?

No. Moving to primarily remote learning must generally be related to public health conditions. Senate File 2310 permits greater flexibility of assignment of teachers outside their endorsement areas and the governor's proclamation allows for an expansion of personnel allowed to provide substitute teacher services to help address this issue.

Regarding identifying close contacts of a COVID-19 case, does within six feet for 15 minutes refer to 15 consecutive minutes or 15 minutes across a span of time such as a school day?

Fifteen minutes refers to 15 consecutive minutes.

What if our school needs to close completely, will we need to make up days?

Senate File 2310 provides for online instruction during times of school closure (such as snow days, governor mandate, or any other reason) which should eliminate the need to make up days. SF 2310 permits greater flexibility of assignment of teachers outside their endorsement areas and the governor's proclamation also expands personnel who are able to provide substitute teacher services with the intent to provide additional support for schools.

Are districts obligated to provide families with a 100% online/remote learning option if there is not supporting medical documentation for the request?

No.

Can you clarify how to count hours/days of instruction in a hybrid model? Do kids who choose remote learning and/or kids in a hybrid model who learn remotely some days of the week have a minimum number of minutes of learning required while remote? Does the district need to ensure 540 hours of in-person learning for each student?

The amount of instructional time offered through remote learning or in-person instruction is based on what the district or school is offering in their calendar over a two-week period, not on what each individual student receives. Students who are learning remotely 100% of the time are not considered in this determination.

For example, if you have 100 students in your district, and 20 of them either choose remote instruction or must be provided with remote instruction for health reasons, only 80 students remain. The calculation of instructional time provided over a two week period is done by considering the amount of in-person and remote learning available to the remaining 80 students. If, over any two week period, the district provides at least 50% of instruction in-person for the remaining 80 students the standard is met. This needs to be met for each grade level.

As an additional example, the instructional time should be considered at the level of the school schedule, not the individual student. If a school offers 30 hours of instruction in a 5 day period, 15 of which are in-person, this meets the standard as long as all of the attending students get 15 hours of in-person instruction on average. Every individual child does not need to receive exactly 15 hours of in-person instruction. Individual student schedules and circumstances will vary.

If a teacher is providing instruction remotely but the students are in the classroom with an associate monitoring the classroom, does this count as in person instruction?

Yes. If the students are in-person, it is fine for the teacher to be remote as long as the instruction is designed by the appropriately endorsed teacher. The associate or additional teacher in the classroom would be there to assist with delivery of instruction.

If a student or staff person suspects they may have COVID-19 and are tested, is it required that they self-isolate until the test has been confirmed?

In general, anyone who is being tested should self-isolate until they receive results. Individuals should follow the advice of a medical professional in each case.

What requirements does the district have regarding school lunch during remote learning (either because of parent choice, implementation of a hybrid model, or temporary remote learning)?

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) begins when school is in session. School lunch must be offered to enrolled students in attendance both remotely and in-person. NSLP meals are claimed at the free, reduced, and paid reimbursement rates with the exception of schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision.

New (9-29-20) When can a district resume in-person sports and other extracurricular activities?

In-person sports and other activities can resume by grade level on the Saturday prior to the school week in which school buildings are open and in-person learning, including learning provided through a hybrid model, is an option available for families who select it. The hybrid model does not need to provide 50% in-person instruction to be eligible to offer in-person extracurricular activities, so long as it is not 100% online/remote.

For example, if high school students will return to in-person learning on Monday, September 21, in-person sports and activities for high school students can resume on Saturday, September 19. If middle school students in the same district will return to in-person learning on Monday, September 28, in-person sports and activities for middle school students can resume on Saturday, September 26.

New (9-29-20) If a district chooses to use a learning model that does not meet compliance with the requirement to offer at least 50% of instruction in-person without permission from the Department, how much instruction will the district need to make up to meet instructional time requirements?

The number of hours or days the district will need to make up depends on the amount of time the district spent using an unapproved model that did not offer at least 50% of instruction in-person. In general, a district may count all of the hours or days of instruction up to 50%, since this is how much online or remote instruction may be provided in an approved hybrid model. For example, a school that offers only 25% of instruction in-person, would have to make up the remaining 25% of in-person instructional time to meet the 50% requirement. Staff from the Department will help districts or schools calculate the remaining hours or days to be made up on a case-by-case basis.

New (9-29-20) If a district is not using a compliant Return-to-Learn plan, will students still earn credit? Will they graduate?

The decision to award credit is made by districts based on local policies. A district can and should continue to award credit to students even if the district is not in full compliance with the requirement of Iowa Code. Students may also graduate when they have completed graduation requirements. Graduating seniors may be dismissed 30 hours or five days prior to the end of the school year.

New (9-29-20) If students and staff are wearing face coverings and someone tests positive for COVID-19, do all close contacts need to quarantine, or is this need mitigated by wearing face coverings?

If both the COVID-19 infected person and the other person(s) in contact with them—even within six feet for 15 minutes—are wearing face coverings, the persons in contact do not need to quarantine. The COVID-19 infected person always needs to isolate in accordance with public health guidelines. Please see the IDPH [guidance](#) released on this topic.

Questions and Additional Guidance

If you have questions, please contact your [school improvement consultant](#). If they are unable to assist you, they will connect you with the appropriate person.