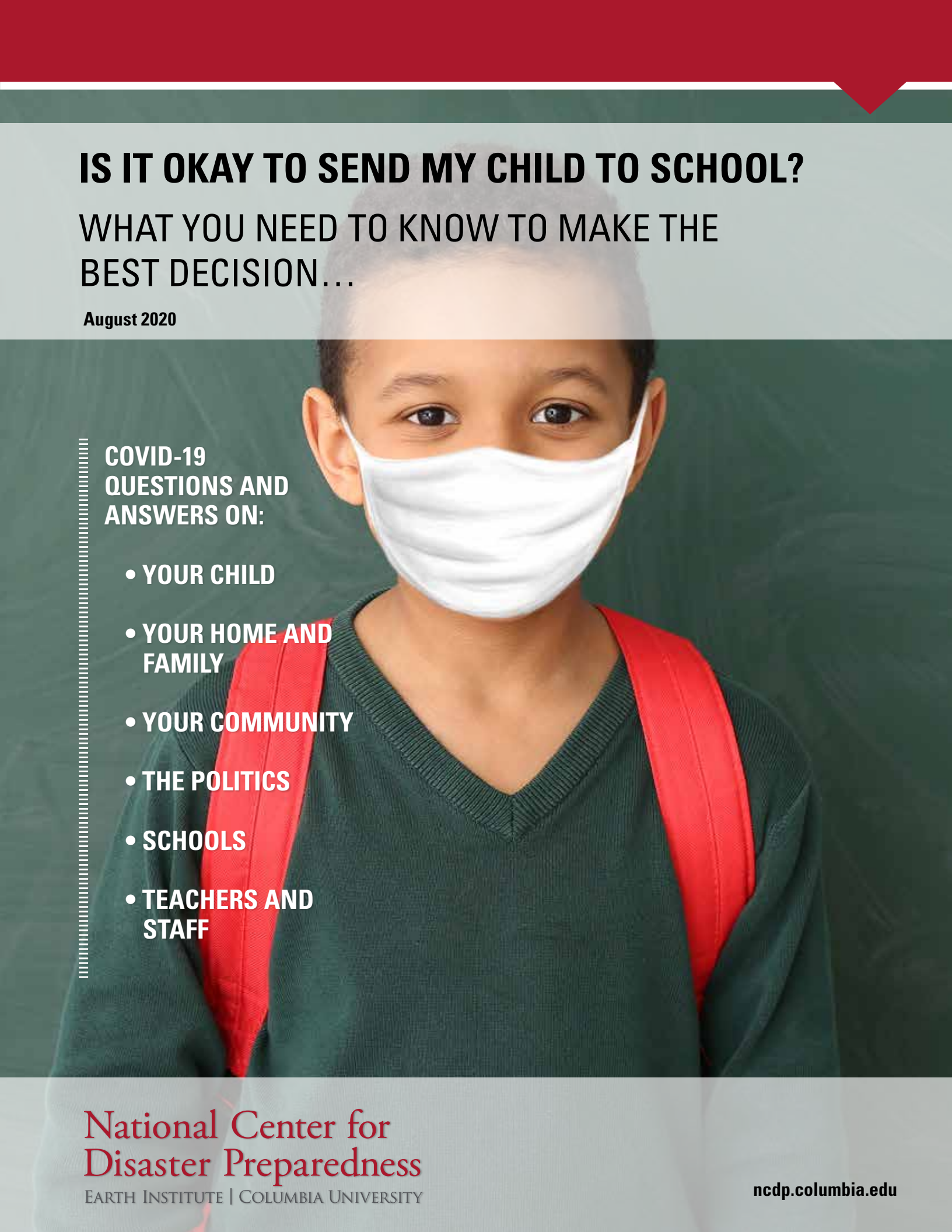


# IS IT OKAY TO SEND MY CHILD TO SCHOOL?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE THE  
BEST DECISION...

August 2020



COVID-19  
QUESTIONS AND  
ANSWERS ON:

- YOUR CHILD
- YOUR HOME AND FAMILY
- YOUR COMMUNITY
- THE POLITICS
- SCHOOLS
- TEACHERS AND STAFF

National Center for  
Disaster Preparedness

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# Is it okay to send my child to school?

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## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised profound questions for our society, but none more difficult and agonizing for parents: **Is it safe for my child to be in school?** In this new Covid-19 era, here is what you need to know and think about – and what questions you need to be asking.

It is important to remember that, as opposed to what we thought months ago, children can carry the Coronavirus, infect others and become ill from Covid-19, although far less frequently and generally less severely than adults.

Keep in mind, too, that new developments, including advances in testing, new medications, changes in community transmission of the virus, and an effective vaccine may change everything. The considerations presented are for context and the recommendations that follow are what we believe are in line with best practices as of late summer 2020. That said, we shouldn't be surprised if new insights demand changes to how we respond to the pandemic.

### Your Child



### Principles

Every child is unique, and we know that many factors may contribute to making a decision about in-class versus remote learning. But remember that it is extremely important that every child regains a strong educational trajectory. For many children, prolonged interruption of school has already had a serious impact. **Getting back in the swing of consistent school is an extremely high priority.**

### Decision Points

- Many children will do just fine with internet-based remote learning. But some will not – and these are the children that we must be particularly concerned about – and make sure they can get back to a regular classroom as soon as possible.
- Your child may need access to meals, health care and special services to meet special needs that typically are provided in the school environment. This is an extremely important factor in determining what's best for your child.

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE THE BEST DECISION...

## Your Home and Family



### Principles

When we all lived in the bubble of sheltering-in-place, schools closed and, for the most part, every child was home with limited contact outside of the immediate household. Certainly, there were particular challenges if an older relative or someone with high risk factors lived in the same house. We needed to keep our children away from anyone at special risk.

Once your child is in a classroom with other children, however, **he or she may become an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic (infected but not yet showing symptoms) carrier of the Coronavirus and a potential risk for everyone in the house, including parents.** That means that if a parent has diabetes, is significantly overweight or has other risk factors, there may be additional concerns about the potential of an asymptomatic child who picks up the infection in school. The bottom line is that a child or adult does not have to feel sick to spread the virus.

### Decision Points

The answer to these questions may help determine whether or not it is feasible for you to consider an “all remote” option, instead of returning to the classroom, even on a part-time basis.

- Is your home a good place for independent or remote learning?
- Do you have access to the internet and a suitable device, like a laptop computer or tablet that your child always has access to?
- Is there a quiet place to study?
- Is there someone who can assist your child to cope with the challenges of online learning?
- Are you working and really need to work, or do you serve as an essential worker?

It could be critical that your child is in a regular and predictable school situation or that supportive, affordable childcare and the ability to learn remotely are in place.

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## Your Community



### Principles

Many experts feel that a good measure of how well Covid-19 is controlled is reflected by the percentage of people who have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19 in your community. (For instance, as of August 2020, New York City has a positivity rate of about 1% - extremely low compared to last April when New York City was the global epicenter of the pandemic.)

### Decision Points

- Does the outbreak seem to be under control in my city or county?
- Are the rates of hospitalizations and fatalities from Covid-19 falling or very low in the community? That may be even more important as an indicator of outbreak control than positive tests.
- Are you seeing most people wearing masks when outdoors and respecting physical separation guidelines? This is a subjective observation, of course, but an important one that reflects the fact that your neighbors are taking the risks seriously.



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## The Politics



## Principles

Hopefully, you are fortunate enough to live in a state and a community where thoughtful, smart and committed leaders are making good decisions and well thought out plans based on science and the best evidence available. That should be reflected in the details for reopening schools or establishing accessible and excellent means of remote, internet-based learning opportunities.

## Decision Points

- Have leaders been honest and transparent in terms of what they know and what is still unknown?
- Are the leaders ready to reclose the schools if circumstances so demand? **What are the criteria for closing a classroom? Closing a school?**
- Is there a commitment to establishing enough appropriately equipped centers where children may learn “remotely” under supervision should parents be essential workers who must have a safe supportive environment for their children.

A reopening timeline must not be dictated by some arbitrary date, as opposed to whenever there is full compliance with a particular school’s readiness as outlined in the section that follows.



# Back-to-School Checklist

- ❑ Has there been clear guidance from the Department of Education to ensure that districts, principals and teachers understand the requirements for all schools to open? Reopening principles and procedures should be consistent throughout the system. Principals should not have to “freelance” what needs to be done.
- ❑ Is there screening every day on entry to school for all adults and children? “Point of care” testing for the Covid-19 virus on a regular basis is desirable but still not quite feasible. In the meantime, regular available laboratory testing for the virus (not “serology” for antibodies) should be mandatory for teachers and staff, and under some circumstances, for students as well.

## Recommendations for Schools

- Children, faculty, or staff who have symptoms that might be compatible with Covid-19 or influenza should stay home and, if necessary, seek medical care and appropriate testing.
- Classrooms set up for strict separation meaning low density of children, at least 6 feet of separation and possibly partitions between desks.
- No congregate activities, including gym, auditorium events, cafeteria eating (students to eat at desks), contact sports and so on.
- Mandatory masks for students, teachers and staff.
- Limit movement beyond the classrooms.
- Sufficient hand washing and hand sanitizing stations throughout the school.
- Protocols should be in place to make sure bathrooms are not over-occupied
- One-way traffic in hallways, with floor directional arrows clearly apparent.
- No classroom should be utilized without adequate ventilation and, in some cases, HEPA filtration.
- Schools need to be regularly and thoroughly cleaned.
- Parents should understand what arrangements are being made to protect students who depend on busses or any form of public transportation to get to and from school.
- Because we are deeply concerned about the overlap of the Covid-19 threat with the coming influenza season, consideration should be given to mandating that all children and adults get vaccinated against seasonal flu.

# Recommendations for Teachers and Staff

- Special arrangements must be made for teachers and staff who are high risk for Covid-19.
- Teachers should be allowed back into the schools for a period of time to allow for preparation and re-acclimation prior to students returning.
- Teachers should be prepared to:
  - (a) Integrate social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care to holistically support students returning to school after a prolonged disruption and,
  - (b) Assist and support children in all aspects of remote learning.
- A nurse and isolation room must be available every day and proper protocols established for managing children or adults with suspect symptoms.

## Conclusion

It can be fairly said that the decision to reopen schools is one of the most difficult, controversial and stressful that we have faced since the pandemic crisis began. For six months we have lived in a bubble, with some 55 million children not in school, living with their nuclear families in relative isolation. This has been extremely difficult for working families and their children who struggle not to lose educational momentum.

We support the idea of getting children back in school, in person and/ or via remote learning protocols. Other options could include classes being held outdoors, weather permitting. But we insist that this return should not be rushed in ways that might put children, teachers, and staff at unnecessary risk of becoming infected and spreading Covid-19 among their peers, families or the community in general. **Parents, policy makers and school officials should not insist that all schools must be open at a single date.** Each school should be opened when it is ready, and that means when adequate safety guidelines are met.

**By all means, let's get our children back to school!** But comprehensive, evidence-informed planning are necessary to making sure that schools are as prepared as possible to minimize spread of Covid-19. And we need to recognize that no matter what measures are put in place, the possibility of new outbreaks may be impossible to eliminate. The fact is that when people of any age gather in congregate settings there is a potential threat of an outbreak resurgence or exacerbation.

**~We'll do the best we can to keep everyone safe. That's all we can do. ~**

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COVID-19 BACK TO SCHOOL

