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# CDC says risk of coronavirus in schools is small

A new report documents relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in classrooms.

*By Alexandra Kelley | Jan. 27, 2021*

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## Story at a glance

**New CDC research shows a low risk of COVID-19 infections among students in in-person schooling.**

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**This is largely contingent on mask adherence.**

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New research published Tuesday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests the risk of COVID-19 spread in classrooms is relatively low, adding new questions over the continued closure of in-person education across the nation.

Published in the JAMA medical journal, researchers discuss the results of several studies looking at COVID-19 exposure among children under the age of 18. One case-controlled study was in Mississippi. Out of 397 participants, 154 were diagnosed with a COVID-19 infection. Attending close social gatherings or interacting with members outside of their households was a leading cause of infection, but in-person school attendance was not.

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Similar results were recorded when examining 11 school districts in North Carolina, featuring 90,000 students and staff occupying school classrooms for nine weeks.

Researchers found that within-school transmissions were rare, with only 32 COVID-19 infections traced back to exposure in school settings. A far greater number of infections, 773, were linked to other community sources of transmission.

Another report out of Wisconsin showcased low transmission among 17 K-12 schools — so long as students and faculty wore masks.

“The investigators concluded that these data, together with the observation that rates of infection among teachers and nonteachers were generally similar, indicated that schools were not associated with accelerating community transmission,” researchers wrote.

However, other reports outside of the U.S. acknowledge outbreaks that occurred in school settings. Contributing factors were crowded classrooms, non-universal face mask usage and recirculated air in closed environments.

Many U.S. schools that have opted to reopen have enforced public health precautions and worked to shrink class sizes to reduce crowded indoor situations.

President Biden announced new guidelines with the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services with the goal to open schools at the K-8 level in about 100 days.

Biden asked Congress for about \$130 billion in school funding for K-12 schools to help cover reopening costs and support teachers and faculty who have been laid off.

Meanwhile, CDC researchers conclude that while educational settings have a low risk for transmission, congregate living communities, namely college dorms, show higher levels of COVID-19 transmission risk.

A major contributing factor that will support reopening schools will be to reduce transmission outside of the classroom, meaning refraining from being in crowded public spaces and adhering to public health measures.

“All recommended mitigation measures in schools must continue: requiring universal face mask use, increasing physical distance by dedensifying [sic] classrooms and common areas, using hybrid attendance models when needed to limit the total number of contacts and prevent crowding, increasing room air ventilation, and expanding screening testing to rapidly identify and isolate asymptomatic infected individuals,” authors concluded.

Additionally, while carefully engineered classroom settings may boast a low COVID-19 transmission rate, other school-based activities, including sports, are still high risks for outbreaks.

“With 2 vaccines now being distributed under Emergency Use Authorizations and more vaccine options anticipated to be available in the coming months, there is much hope on the horizon for a safer environment for schools and school-related athletic activities during the 2021/22 school year,” the report authors forecast. “Committing today to policies that prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission in communities and in schools will help ensure the future social and academic welfare of all students and their education.”

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## **WAS THE CAPITOL RIOT A COVID-19 SUPERSPREADER EVENT?**