

COVID-19 Return to School Considerations for Recess



COVID-19 has resulted in uncertainty and unrest in respect to various parts of the school day – including recess. As schools reopen, the primary focus must be on the health and well-being of students. This includes unstructured time to release, recharge, and refocus their energy. Recess is an essential component of a supportive return to school environment where students can grow, learn, and play.



A critical part of returning to school will be healing from collective trauma and focusing on mental and physical health. It is important—for both teachers and students—to ensure that they have the time and space in the school day to connect with others in activities that allow for meaningful and playful engagement.

[Global Recess Alliance, Statement on Recess](#)



Below are considerations to support educators, administrators, and school board officials with the planning and implementation of recess when students return to school.

Follow public health and safety guidelines.

Be sure to adhere to the guidelines for your school jurisdiction in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. Ensure that all students are aware of the protocol for physical distancing, equipment, and handwashing.

Schedule regular recess periods.

This may require staggering times to ensure public health protocols are followed. If possible, keep recess times the same to support with developing a return to school routine.

Include students with a disabilities.

Access to play has been even more limited for students with disabilities. Ensure that all students in the school have regular recess periods. Extra planning and considerations may be required for students who are immunocompromised but unstructured time in the school day is critical.

Divide the schoolyard into areas or zones.

Designate different zones or areas for unstructured play, pavement games, and structured games to limit the amount of students within a given area. Students are welcome to move between zones freely but must follow public health and safety guidelines in your jurisdiction before moving to a different zone. Monitor the amount of students in zones and create an additional zone or increase the size of that zone.

Hold recess outdoors as much as possible.

Students have missed opportunities to be outdoors to play over the last number of months - reconnecting with the outdoors is important for their health and well-being.

Have separate equipment for each area or zone and sanitize the equipment between recess periods.

If washing equipment is too difficult or prohibited, consider equipment that is used with the feet only (e.g., soccer ball, etc.) or equipment that each student can have one of their own (i.e. skipping rope, tennis ball, etc.).

Involve students in recess planning.

Provide students with a voice and ask them what games or activities they would like to play at recess. Support students with playing these games or activities or help them modify the games and activities to ensure they follow public health and safety guidelines.

Students will think, feel, act, and move differently – be prepared and provide support as needed.

This may require supporting them with conflict resolution, problem solving, strong emotions, and more. Consider running co-operative and inclusion games that provide students with an opportunity to reconnect with their peers outside of the classroom environment. Be mindful to make structured activities optional so students who would prefer to engage in unstructured play have that opportunity.

Informed by the Global Recess Alliance's [Statement on Recess](#)

