



RESOURCE GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS HOSTING AND FAMILIES PARTICIPATING IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEARNING PODS

Across Colorado, we are all adjusting to the changes and challenges of COVID-19, especially when it comes to work and school. While parents and caregivers need to work, many children in Colorado are not immediately returning to in-person school instruction.

As you consider care and learning environments for your children this school year, whether it be a child care home or center, a school district building, a learning pod, or informal groups of children doing virtual learning together, it is important to consider the health and safety of these environments for children. The education and safety guidance contained in this document is to assist individuals hosting and families participating in temporary instructional learning pods.

As authorized by [Executive Order D 2020 188](#), without a license, an adult may supervise a group of children (referred to as a “learning pod”) with a maximum of eight children age 10 and older, or a maximum of five children ages six to nine. This Executive Order is intended to give parents and students short-term flexibility at the beginning of this school year while also keeping children safe during this time. This is not a permanent change to Colorado law.



KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE: THE BASICS

- [Research licensed child care](#) options available in your community. Licensed child care remains the best, safest option for children. Many licensed child care providers have space for additional children and the state is working with providers to temporarily increase licensed capacity.

For learning pods, the state strongly recommends that parents take the following actions:

- Request an [internet background check](#) through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for anyone providing instruction or supervision or with access to children. Background checks cost \$5.00 per check.
- [Register learning pods](#) with the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) by providing the name, email, and address of adults operating the learning pod and the number of students in each pod. This will allow the state to support pods with information about free trainings on health, safety and child development practices.
- Gather emergency contact information for each child and create a plan for children with health needs, such as medications, allergies, dietary restrictions or other concerns. Have a plan for medical emergencies.
- Ensure that all hazardous items (weapons, alcohol, medications, etc.) are locked up and inaccessible to children.
- [Create an emergency evacuation plan](#) and select alternative pick-up locations.
- Discuss the type of guidance strategies that will be used with the children. Ensure that no corporal punishment or harsh discipline is allowed.
- Develop a plan for providing meals and snacks, including who will be supplying the food.

KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE: HOW TO BE COVID READY

- [Develop screening procedures](#) to check for symptoms of COVID-19 daily and discuss when children must be sent home or may not attend.
- Inform your [local public health department](#) of any suspected or known cases of COVID-19.
- Ensure you have supplies including [face coverings](#), [cleaning and disinfecting supplies](#), soap and hand sanitizer, and a thermometer.
- Encourage physical distancing by marking off designated learning areas that are 6 feet apart.
- Communicate who will be responsible for facilitating the instructional learning pod, and talk about any other individuals that will be at the home while providing the instruction. Limit any outside visitors.



WHILE CHILDREN ARE IN ATTENDANCE

- Ensure that sick children stay home and screen children for symptoms of COVID-19 prior to attendance each day.
- Have children wear a face covering, practice physical distancing, and keep consistent groups of children to the extent possible.
- Try to eliminate shared use of learning materials to the extent possible.
- Practice good [hand washing](#) throughout the day, upon arrival, after using the bathroom, and before meals and snacks.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces throughout the day and after providing meals and snacks.
- Continually communicate to families on any updated procedures or changes to scheduling.



AFTER CHILDREN LEAVE/PRIOR TO CHILDREN'S ARRIVAL EACH DAY

- Clean and disinfect all surfaces and materials.

GUIDANCE ON LEARNING POD STRUCTURES FROM THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE)

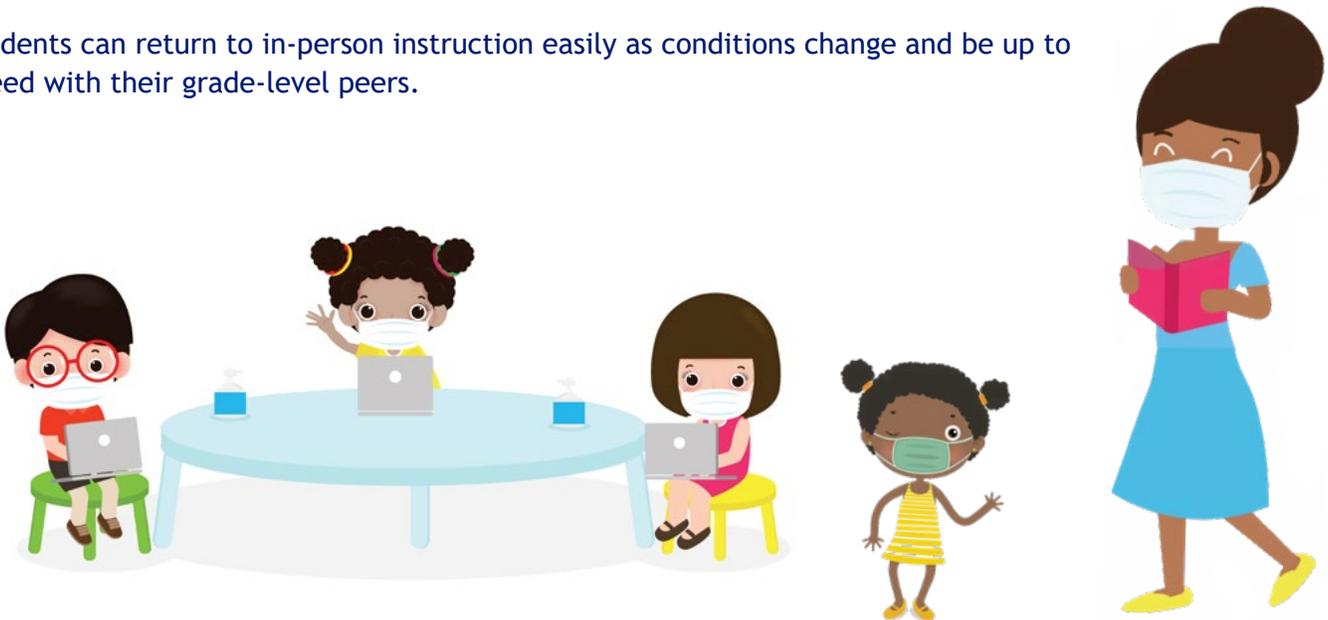
When considering a learning pod for your child, it's important to understand the implications for how the pod functions.

LEARNING POD BASICS

Learning pods are a new phenomenon and have many variations. The biggest distinction is whether students are enrolled in their local public school. This difference has implications for parents to consider.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND: LEARNING PODS FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

- For students enrolled in public school, school districts facilitate the curriculum, and students are responsible for completing assignments and meeting the attendance and behavioral expectations of the school. You can be assured your child(ren) are learning what they need to be successful in the next school year.
- Learning pods that are offered by school districts are not subject to any additional licensing requirements.
- The learning pod leader (whoever is supervising the students) functions like a tutor, helping students to understand independent learning activities and providing supervision. The pod may meet in the school, in a licensed child care setting, or in a private home.
- Attendance requirements still apply! Students will still need to understand and follow the attendance policies for their school.
- Your student will still receive grades and is responsible for their schoolwork. This is especially important for high school students who need to maintain continuity for high school transcripts.
- Students can return to in-person instruction easily as conditions change and be up to speed with their grade-level peers.



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND: HOMESCHOOLING VS PRIVATE SCHOOL

Learning pods for students that are not enrolled in their local school would either be considered homeschooling or private schooling. Parents should be aware of the difference and what this means for their students. To stay compliant with attendance law, a student between the ages of six and sixteen must be enrolled in a public school, a private school, or a homeschool program.

What is considered homeschooling?

A learning pod is not considered a homeschool program if the instructor is not the student's parent or adult relative. If the student's parent or family member is the primary instructor, parents must follow state laws regarding homeschooling. [Learn more about homeschooling in Colorado.](#)

What is considered private school?

Learning pods where the primary instructor is not a parent or adult relative would be considered private schools. Private schools are considered private businesses. [The Colorado Secretary of State's website](#) has information on the laws around operating a private school.

- If the learning pod is functioning as a private school, make sure the pod meets the [legal requirements for operating as a private school](#).
- Parents need to properly document their child's grades and course completion if students are not enrolled in a public school. Because CDE and local school districts do not have jurisdiction over private school operations, neither serve as the custodian of school records - including transcripts - for private schools.

What else do I need to know?

- If you disenroll your student from a public school temporarily and plan to re-enroll them, the following considerations may apply:
 - Students may not have access to the same learning environment when they return. If a school is overenrolled, a student would not be guaranteed admission.
 - The curriculum in the private or homeschool learning pod may not be aligned to the state academic standards, and learning gaps may need to be addressed.
- With a few exceptions, public schools in Colorado are funded based on student enrollment as of October, commonly known as October Count. Students who enroll after October Count place an added financial burden on schools and districts, because schools and districts will not receive any funding for those students. Parents and caregivers are encouraged, when it is within their control, to plan their enrollment decisions in a way that helps support proper student funding.
- Parents should be aware that students in special education who are not enrolled in their local public school may not be provided the same specially designed instruction required by their individual education plans (IEPs). These students also do not have an individual entitlement to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Still have questions about learning pods? Contact Melissa Colman, Ph.D., Associate Commissioner at CDE at colman_m@cde.state.co.us.