

# Joining a Learning Pod?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some parents around Austin are joining or seeking to form learning “pods.” These pods may take a variety of forms, including but not limited to:

- **Facilitated Pods**- A facilitator, who may or may not be a certified teacher, supervises and assists children while they engage in their school’s remote learning activities.
- **Co-ops**- Parents from two or more families take turns hosting all the children in their homes for remote learning.
- **Micro-schools**- A certified teacher teaches the children who may not be enrolled in a formal school or using a school’s remote curriculum.
- **Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care**- An informal care arrangement with a family member, friend, or neighbor to care for school age children from one or more families during the day.
- **Community Learning Spaces**- Facilitated by community organizations, groups of parents, faith-based organizations, or public entities that provide in-person support to students during times of remote instruction.

Similar to COVID-19 health concerns with children going back to school, there are health and safety considerations for learning pods. It is not possible to reduce all risk of COVID-19 in pods. Thinking about joining a pod? Do your research and ask the following questions.

## Does the pod host have a COVID-19 health and safety plan that addresses the following?

1. **At-Home Symptom Screening** (See page 17 of [Austin Public Health \(APH\) Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Will each pod participant be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 before joining the pod each day?
2. **Face Coverings** (See pages 14-16 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Are children and adults required to wear face coverings?
3. **Physical Distancing** (See page 13 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Will participants in the pod be practicing physical distancing by remaining 6 feet apart?
  - Is the space hosting the pod large enough to allow for physical distancing?
4. **Healthy Hand Hygiene** (See page 12 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Does the host have ample supplies of soap, hand sanitizer, and tissues accessible to children?
  - Is there a plan for [frequent hand washing](#) at key times throughout the day?
5. **Cleaning and Disinfection** (See page 19 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Will there be increased routine cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces, including supplies and toys that must be shared?
  - Will hosts follow [CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfection](#) if someone becomes sick?
6. **Meals and Snacks** (See pages 24-25 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Will children bring their own food, utensils, and refillable water bottles? If not, will the host serve individually plated food?
7. **Isolation of Individuals with COVID-like Symptom(s)** (See page 31 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - Is there a designated separate area for isolating individuals showing COVID-19 symptoms?
  - Will parents be immediately notified if their child shows symptoms so the child can be picked up and taken home quickly? Find out about COVID-19 testing [here](#).
8. **COVID-19 Positive Case** (See pages 34-36 and 39 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))
  - If a pod participant tests positive for COVID-19, will all families be immediately notified of potential exposure and close contacts be asked to quarantine for 14 days?
  - If a household member of a pod participant tests positive for COVID-19, will the other pod families be immediately notified of potential exposure?

# Joining a Learning Pod?

- Find out about free lodging for those who cannot safely self-isolate due to COVID-19 [here](#) under the heading “Isolation Facility.”

## Have you also thought about these health and safety steps?

### 1. Training and Safety Measures

- Does the host have experience working with school-age children?
- Do you know the host’s approach to promoting positive behavior, redirecting children, and responding to inappropriate behavior?
- Does the host have current training/certification in CPR and First Aid?
- Have the host and any adults over the age of 18 in the host’s home passed a criminal background check?
- Do you have the contact information for the other families in the pod?
- Is the host familiar with [Texas Health and Human Services’ Minimum Standards](#) for child care providers? Will the host follow the HHS Minimum Standards?

### 2. Environmental Safety

- Are there firearms in the home? If yes, are they locked up?
- Are there working smoke detectors in the home?
- Are cleaning supplies and chemicals kept out of reach of children?
- Are medications kept out of reach of children?
- Is there a swimming pool onsite? If yes, is there a fence around it? What measures are in place to [keep children safe around the pool](#)?

### 3. Families in the Pod

- Do you know the host?
- Does the pod consist of a small, stable group of children and adults?
- Outside of the pod, what steps are the families taking to avoid getting COVID-19? For example, are they using face coverings, physically distancing, avoiding large gatherings, and skipping outings that are not necessary?

### 4. High-risk individuals (See pages 10-11 of [APH Interim Guidance for Schools](#))

- Does your child have a condition that puts them at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19?
- Is anyone else in your household at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19?

### 5. Outdoor Time

- Can lessons, mealtimes, and playtime be held outdoors as much as possible?
- Are there shady or covered outdoor spaces available?
- Are pest control measures in place?
- Is the outdoor area kept in good condition and clear of safety hazards?

### 6. Transportation

- Will each family drop off and pick up their own child(ren)?
- If hosts will be transporting children, are they equipped to do so safely (enough seat belts, car seats and booster seats, licensed driver)?

### 7. Child Care Regulations

- Is the host a child care provider who is [licensed, registered, or listed with Texas Health and Human Services Child Care Regulations](#)?