

# Is your family ready to return to the community?



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**M**ASSACHUSETTS entered Phase 3 of its reopening plan on July 6, and numerous businesses, dining establishments, health and recreational facilities, and schools have already reopened their doors.

While many students – and their parents – are looking forward to the resumption of in-school learning, getting out of their homes and back into the world, some may be fearful about returning to school or even going out into the community. After months of being “safer at home,” it can feel not-so-safe to venture out.

Ultimately, parents will need to make the decision that is right for their family. For those who do feel ready to return to the community, the following are some tips to help prepare your children for a safe and enjoyable reentry.

■ Consider creating a social story that will help you set your child’s expectations before going out. There are many helpful websites on the Internet that will help you do that, including [autismresourcecentral.org/social-stories-for-young-and-old-on-covid-19/](https://autismresourcecentral.org/social-stories-for-young-and-old-on-covid-19/)

■ Practice going out into the community by engaging in low-risk activities. For example, you might simply take a car ride to enjoy some different scenery, take a walk/hike, or go a family picnic in a new-to-you outdoor setting.

■ Practice mask-wearing in your backyard and during walks in the neighborhood. Discuss “mask etiquette” with your child (e.g., the proper way to wear a mask and why it is important to keep it as clean as possible).

■ Explain why hugs and high-fives are no longer acceptable greetings for neighbors and friends. Practice new ways to greet people.

■ Practice social distancing. Help your child understand what it means to keep a six-foot distance away from people who are not members of his/her family.

■ Many stores and community locations are using visuals on the floor to help us stay socially distanced. Use sidewalk chalk to make boxes or circles that are six feet apart on your driveway to practice following these cues. Pretend you are waiting in line for ice cream is a fun way to practice this skill. Maybe reward your child with a trip to the local ice cream stand!

■ Encourage your child to come with you to the grocery store to shop for just a few items at a time when it will not be crowded. Practice wearing your masks and keeping socially distanced from others.

■ Bring hand sanitizer with you when you have an outing and discuss when to use it. When you return home, be sure everyone washes their

hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

When the time is right for your family, and with the proper precautions, getting back into the world can be fun. Preparing and practicing the new skills needed to stay safe are ways to reassure your child and help establish new expectations about what it means to be out in the community whether it is at school, going to the store, or getting some ice cream on a hot summer day.

If you are not sure whether returning to the community is right for your family, consider consulting with your healthcare provider about any concerns that you might have. For additional information on Massachusetts’ reopening plan, visit [mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-updates-and-information#reopening-massachusetts](https://mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-updates-and-information#reopening-massachusetts)

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*May Institute is a nonprofit organization that is a national leader in the field of applied behavior analysis, serving individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities, brain injury and neurobehavioral disorders, and other special needs. May Institute operates four schools for children and adolescents with ASD and other developmental disabilities, including one in West Springfield. For more information, call 800-778-7601 or visit [mayinstitute.org](https://www.mayinstitute.org).*