

**The Minister**

**Your contact person**

**Direct phone number**  
Tel. +49 361 57100  
Fax +49 361 573411690

poststelle@  
tmbjs.thueringen.de

Erfurt,  
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Thüringer Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport  
Postfach 90 04 63 . 99107 Erfurt

To all parents of school-age children, and to  
pupils of full legal age attending school in  
Thuringia

**Corona self-tests at Thuringian schools as of April 12, 2021**

Dear parents and guardians, dear pupils,

“All children belong in school.” This concept has been taken for granted in Germany and Thuringia for generations. But for more than a year now, the pandemic has turned school life as we know it upside down, similar to a natural catastrophe affecting all areas of life.

All of you are all too familiar with the challenges of the corona crisis. I understand your fears and concerns and share many of them myself. Over and over, you and your children have been forced to adjust to completely new situations, often in a very short period of time. Many of you have shared with me how difficult this has been for you. But as important as foresight and planning are, reacting quickly in times of crisis is just as crucial. The virus does not adhere to any kind of predictable schedule. Allow me to express my heartfelt thanks for your ongoing patience and flexibility! The crux of this pandemic for us is, after all, finding the proper balance between good education and personal health and safety.

In this letter, I would like to present our plan for in-person instruction through the end of the schoolyear in the era of Covid. And I assure you that we continue to provide outstanding education, despite all the challenges and adversities – and despite the fact that some schools may still have to be closed temporarily.

**Self-tests after Easter break**

Although the pandemic may be advancing, we also have new ways of counteracting it. The latest in our strategy:

**As of April 12, 2021, we will introduce comprehensive fast tests which everyone can carry out by themselves (self-tests).**

This measure is designed to ensure safer in-person instruction for all pupils. It will allow us to identify infected persons with no signs of illness, and thus slow the spread of disease. After the Easter break, every individual learning

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**Thüringer Ministerium  
für Bildung, Jugend  
und Sport**  
Werner-Seelenbinder-Str. 7  
99096 Erfurt

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or working at schools will be given the opportunity to test themselves twice per week.

This does not replace other key components such as social distancing, personal hygiene, protective masks, and ventilation; these rules remain as important as ever.

The new self-testing concept is in accordance with the state government's strategy of pandemic defense, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Testing:** The new self-tests, which will be conducted at school under teacher supervision, are easy to use – much easier, and in particular more pleasant, than previous fast tests. We may end up switching to a different test model, should other tests prove to be more reliable or easier to use, or if we have to adjust to market factors. But the principle of self-testing will remain in place.  
These self-tests are free, and they are voluntary. You may opt out of testing, and children who do not undergo testing will continue to take part in instruction. My personal request to you: Let us join forces to encourage all children and youth to take part in the tests, to ensure a safer school for everyone! In all frankness however, I do have to mention: If very few pupils take part in testing in the coming weeks, we will have to consider barring children from entering school grounds, or making testing mandatory.  
It is very important for me that children are not afraid of the test, nor of a potential positive result. Any of us could become infected, whether at school or elsewhere. We can only combat the pandemic by identifying infection. Knowledge is power, and this testing concept is a key element in facilitating education.  
For for information, please refer to the attached FAQ.
- **Vaccination:** Many teachers have already been vaccinated, for which I am extremely thankful. Every vaccination makes us all safer.
- **Tracking** and contact reduction: We implemented school cohorts some time ago and have reduced contacts within schools to a minimum. As soon as infection occurs, schools quickly and reliably communicate all contacts to the health authorities.
- **Protective measures:** Schools have been working with numerous well-practiced protective measures for months. They include maintaining distance, wearing masks, complying with hygiene rules, and regular ventilation. As a result, it may still be necessary to alternate in-person attendance in upper grades.

### **In-person and distance learning**

We must be prepared to continue to alternate between in-person and distance learning through the end of the schoolyear. Distance learning phases may be necessary when schools have to close or groups need to be split to maintain minimum distancing.

It is however also possible that certain pupils voluntarily switch to distance learning, by arrangement with school administration. This can be applied for in cases of pre-existing conditions that may mean severe illness for such pupils. Distance learning is also possible if the household includes an at-risk family member. If infection rates increase in your district and you are able to

accommodate at-home learning, you may also apply for an exemption from in-person instruction in order to reduce the general infection risk.

Thuringian schools have made great progress in providing excellent and reliable learning even remotely. Just think of the situation today compared with that of a year ago, and you will realize how far we have come. For more information about what to expect from schools, please refer to the handout about home learning, which is available at our website. Together we will remain flexible and make learning processes even more creative than before.

### **Leaving degrees and educational deficits**

Countless pupils are scheduled to complete their degrees during this challenging schoolyear. I am committed to enabling all pupils to obtain a high-quality, recognized leaving certificate at the end of this schoolyear and/or allowing them to continue their education. We have developed a comprehensive strategy for simplifying exam conditions and properly preparing pupils for exams. May I extend my warmest wishes for success to all degree candidates this year. I am convinced you will pass your exams with flying colors.

Reactions of pupils to the changes necessitated by the pandemic have varied considerably, which is why we will place top priority on making up for potential learning deficits during the current and upcoming schoolyears. We are committed to supporting our teaching staff in this challenging but crucial task. Voluntarily repeating a schoolyear will once again be an option; your children's teachers will advise you on this decision.

My ministry is also developing complementary programs to promote learning during summer break. We will be presenting these plans in May. A new joint funding program is being negotiated between federal and state governments to additionally compensate for educational deficits in the coming schoolyear.

The corona virus continues to challenge us in ways we could never have conceived of before. It is essential that parents, pupils, and teachers close ranks and work together to keep our schools safe and open – with mutual respect, understanding, and support. It takes a strong school community to deal with crisis. Let us continue to do all we can to ensure our children can attend school – now, and in the future.

Sincerely,



Helmut Holter