

Governor Gavin Newsom Lays Out Pandemic Plan for Learning and Safe Schools

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Plan centers on rigorous instruction for students even when schools are physically closed

Decisions to open in-person will be determined by local data that the public can track on a daily basis

Schools open for in-person instruction will implement precautions, including a requirement that students in 3rd grade and above wear masks

Newsom: “In California, health data will determine when a school can be physically open – and when it must close – but learning should never stop”

SACRAMENTO – Governor Gavin Newsom today announced his plan for learning and safe schools ahead of the 2020–2021 school year, as the California Department of Public Health issued a framework for when and how schools should reopen for in-person instruction.

“Learning is non-negotiable,” said Governor Newsom. “The virus will be with us for a year or more, and school districts must provide meaningful instruction in the midst of this pandemic. In California, health data will determine when a school can be physically open – and when it must close – but learning should never stop. Students, staff, and parents all prefer in-classroom instruction, but only if it can be done safely.”

The Governor’s plan centers on five key areas:

1) Safe in-person school based on local health data

The California Department of Public Health today issued updated schools guidance that includes using existing epidemiological metrics to determine if school districts can start in-person instruction. CDPH currently uses six indicators to track the level of COVID-19 infection in each California county as well as the preparedness of the county health care system – data that includes the number of new infections per 100,000 residents, the test

positivity rate, and the change in hospitalization rate, among others. Any county that does not meet the state's benchmarks is put on the County Monitoring List.

Schools located in counties that are on the Monitoring List must not physically open for in-person instruction until their county has come off the Monitoring List for 14 consecutive days. Schools in counties that have not been on the Monitoring List for the prior 14 days may begin in-person instruction, following public health guidelines. School community members – including parents, teachers, staff and students – can track daily data on whether and why their county is on the Monitoring List at <https://covid19.ca.gov/roadmap-counties/#track-data>.

There is a single exception. Local health officers may grant a waiver to allow elementary schools to reopen in-person instruction if the waiver is requested by the district superintendent, in consultation with labor, parents and community-based organizations. When considering a waiver request, the local health officer must consider local data and consult with the California Department of Public Health.

The Department also issued updated guidance for when schools must physically close and revert to distance learning because of COVID-19 infections. Following a confirmed case of a student who was at school during his or her infectious period, other exposed students and staff should be quarantined for 14 days. The school should revert to distance learning when multiple cohorts have cases or 5 percent of students and staff test positive within a 14-day period. The district should revert to distance learning when 25 percent or more of its schools have been physically closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days. Closure decisions should be made in consultation with local health officers. After 14 days, school districts may return to in-person instruction with the approval of the local public health officer.

2) Strong mask requirements for anyone in the school

In the updated guidance, all staff and students in 3rd grade and above will be required to wear a mask or face covering. Students in 2nd grade and below are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering. Students should be provided a face covering if they do not have one. The state has delivered over 18 million face coverings to schools to support them to reopen and ensure all students can participate in learning.

3) Physical distancing requirements & other adaptations

In the updated guidance, CDPH requires that all adults stay 6 feet from one another and 6 feet away from children, while students should maintain 6 feet of distance from one another as practicable. Anyone entering the school must do a health screen, and any student or staff exhibiting a fever or other symptoms will be immediately sent home. The guidance also provides that if anyone in a student or staff member's household is sick, they too should stay home.

4) Regular testing and dedicated contact tracing for outbreaks at schools

The public health guidance recommends staff in every California school be tested for COVID-19 periodically based on local disease trends and as testing capacity allows. The Governor also announced today that the state will provide resources and technical assistance for COVID-19 investigations in school settings.

5) Rigorous distance learning

Over the course of the pandemic, most schools will likely face physical closure at some point due to COVID-19. The Legislature and Governor Newsom enacted a budget that provided \$5.3 billion in additional funding to support learning, and set requirements to ensure schools provide rigorous and grade-appropriate instruction. Under newly enacted state law, school districts are required to provide:

- Devices and connectivity so that every child can participate in distance learning.
- Daily live interaction for every child with teachers and other students.
- Class assignments that are challenging and equivalent to in-person instruction.
- Targeted supports and interventions for English learners and special education students.

The full guidance from the California Department of Public Health can be found here: <https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-schools.pdf>

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