

Pediatric Group Calls for Children to Return to Schools Despite Coronavirus

The academic, physical and mental upsides associated with returning children to schools outweigh the risks, the American Academy of Pediatrics concludes.



By [Lauren Camera](#), Senior Education Writer June 29, 2020, at 12:56 p.m.



PEDIATRICIANS SAY students should be in classrooms for in-person learning as soon as possible – the most full-throated endorsement yet for getting children back into schools amid the coronavirus pandemic and one that was included in a set of recommendations released by the American Academy of Pediatrics for how schools should safely reopen.

[[READ: Schools Need \\$245 Billion to Reopen Safely](#)]

"The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020," the group representing 67,000 pediatricians wrote. "Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation."

"This, in turn, places children and adolescents at considerable risk of morbidity and, in some cases, mortality," the guidance continued. "Beyond the educational impact and social impact of school closures, there has been substantial impact on food security and physical activity for children and families."

The [recommendations](#) acknowledge that infectious disease experts are still learning about the effects of COVID-19 and that all reopening policies must be flexible to account for rapidly changing scenarios. But the academic, physical and mental upsides associated with reopening outweigh the risks, the group concludes, especially as evidence mounts that children may not be the superspreaders medical experts initially assumed they were and that they tend to exhibit milder symptoms when they do contract the virus.

Perhaps most importantly, the pediatric group concludes, reopening is essential for the country's most vulnerable students, including poor students and students of color, who often rely more heavily on the multitude of services schools provide.

"Beyond supporting the educational development of children and adolescents, schools play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity," the guidance reads. "As such, it is critical to reflect on the differential impact SARS-CoV-2 and the associated school closures have had on different races, ethnic and vulnerable populations."

[[MORE: Senate Asks for Estimate on Costs to Reopen Schools](#)]

The specific recommendations largely mirror the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though allow for looser restrictions in some cases. For example, the pediatrician group concedes that in most school settings, requiring 6 feet between students is not feasible without limiting the number of students in a class. It recommends

instead spacing as close as 3 feet, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic.

Rules are generally more lax for younger students in pre-kindergarten and elementary school – a recognition of the reality that younger children aren't likely to comply with social distancing and face mask requirements – and escalate gradually through middle school and into high school.

The guidance comes as few school districts have announced plans to reopen entirely in-person, with most opting instead for a model that allows students to attend school a couple of days a week and work remotely the remainder, with an all-virtual option for students and educators with a high risk for a severe infection.

[[MAP: The Spread of Coronavirus](#)]

While states are rolling out guidance to school districts for reopening, the reality is that most school districts don't yet have a set plan and are stuck [awaiting state and local budget cuts](#) – some projected to be as large as 25% – tied to lost revenue from the economic downturn.

Last week, for example, more than 2,000 educators in Massachusetts were laid off, an early and grim sign that bolsters the National Education Association's estimate that nearly 700,000 educators could lose their job over the next two years and raises major red flags for the ability of schools to reopen at all.

National education groups have been clamoring for additional federal assistance – some insisting it will [cost as much as \\$245 billion](#) to help reopen schools safely amid a pandemic – but it's unclear whether a bailout is realistic given [Republicans' intransigence](#) to committing additional taxpayer funds to the K-12 system.

[Lauren Camera](#), Senior Education Writer

Lauren Camera is a senior writer at U.S. News & World Report. She joined the News team as an ... [READ MORE](#)

Tags: [coronavirus](#), [pandemic](#), [education](#), [K-12 education](#), [children's health](#), [students](#), [United States](#)