March 8, 2021

Recommendation for Urgent Reopening of Schools

AAP-CA 3’s COVID-19 & School Partnership Committee

The American Academy of Pediatrics, California Chapter 3’s COVID-19 & School Partnership Committee hereby reconfirms our recommendation for urgent, safe school reopening for all K-through-12 students.

As physicians caring for children, we operate at the nexus of public health and individual health. The safety of children, educators, and staff is our utmost concern, and its priority should be fundamental in planning school-reopening. Every day students are not in the classroom is detrimental to their physical and mental well-being. The leadership of the AAP-CA3, representing over 500 pediatricians in San Diego and Imperial Counties, strongly supports the urgent safe return of students to in-person education with the appropriate mitigation measures in place of mask wearing, hand washing, cohorting and physical distancing.

EFFECTS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learning itself is now causing harm to our children: we are witnessing an epidemic of depression and anxiety, with failing grades, victimization, and higher rates of physical inactivity and weight gain than their peers now in school. Kids need to return to classrooms with their teachers. Schools provide our children safety, nutrition, mental health support, and social and emotional skill-building. The services provided by schools are even more paramount for children with disabilities and other special needs. In addition, the loss of learning has been more apparent in schools that have remained closed compared to schools that have been open; this will lead to more inequity in education moving forward. Since there is ample data showing that opening schools does not endanger children, educators and school staff, nor raise a community’s risk factors, the adverse consequences for children does not justify keeping schools closed.

COVID-19 VACCINE

Experts including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the UCSD school advisory group have stated that complete vaccination of all staff and teachers is not essential for safe return to in-person education. We wholeheartedly agree that vaccination of teachers and staff will further decrease the likelihood of spread of COVID-19 in schools, and we support the recent inclusion of educators in COVID-19 vaccination distribution in San Diego. Fortunately, even one dose of the currently approved vaccinations prevents 80-90% of serious infections. Studies in North Carolina and Wisconsin showed very little classroom spread of the SARS-COV2 virus in schools prior to the COVID-19 vaccinations being available. This was accomplished with masking, hand washing, physical distancing, and quarantining those ill or in contact with others with COVID-19. Therefore, while vaccines are highly effective for individual protection, they are not a necessity for the safe return of teachers and children to the classroom.

IN CONCLUSION

The vast majority of children and families in San Diego need schools to safely reopen now. Scientific evidence supports this as achievable. We recommend continued collaboration.
between physicians, teachers, and families to facilitate an urgent, safe return to in-person learning, for those ready to return, with continued online learning for those families unable or not ready.

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