



Press release

Local Pediatricians Dismayed that Children are NOT Being Prioritized

PASADENA, CA (September 3, 2020)

Last Friday, the Governor’s office released a “Blueprint for a Safer Economy, a Statewide, Stringent and Slow Plan for Living with COVID-19.” The blueprint details four tiers based on the prevalence of COVID-19 and extent of community transmission in each county. According to the Governor’s website, “Schools in the (Purple) Widespread tier aren’t permitted to reopen for in-person instruction, unless they receive a waiver from their local health department for TK-6 grades. Schools can reopen for in-person instruction once their county has been in the Red (Substantial) tier for at least two weeks.”

In examining the sectors of society which are able to re-open in the Purple/Widespread tier, hair salons & barbershops, shopping centers (including malls and swap meets), and all retail stores may open indoors with modifications. Other businesses such as personal care services; museums, zoos and aquariums; places of worship; movie theaters; hotels; gym & fitness centers; restaurants; family entertainment centers; cardrooms & satellite wagering; and wineries all may open outdoors with modifications.

“It’s a little appalling how pretty much everything can open to some extent except for schools,” says Dr. Casey Nagel, co-chair of the School Health Committee of the local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

In Los Angeles County, a further blow to sending children back to schools was the announcement yesterday by the Department of Public Health that they would no longer consider waiver applications. School officials who attended the County’s telebriefing stated that public health officials deemed it “too unsafe to consider waivers because the virus is transmitted among children.”

“It really is a shame,” says Dr. Tanya Altmann, pediatrician in Calabasas. “Many pediatricians have been working around the clock with school administrators and teachers to help schools with their re-opening plans. I know of dozens of school districts and independent schools who are ready with safe plans, redesigned campuses and schedules as well as testing that exceed state guidelines. These schools are ready to apply for a waiver and should be allowed to prioritize safe in-person education of their students.”

“Schools should be allowed to open just like all of the other sectors of society,” says Dr. Alice Kuo, Professor and Chief of Medicine-Pediatrics at UCLA. “They need a chance to figure out how to live with COVID-19, too. We’re fortunate in Southern California with our weather—schools could start with small classes outside, just like the restaurants and gyms.”

Preschools have been open throughout the pandemic, as part of the recognition that day care should be provided for essential workers. Some preschools never closed, and many more have re-opened since the beginning of June.

“Stating that preschools are safe but kindergarten is then unsafe is not backed by science,” says Dr. Nava Yeganeh, a pediatric infectious diseases specialist. “As our community prevalence decreases, re-opening schools with appropriate infection prevention methods for all students must be a priority on every level.”

Of note, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health did announce that beginning Monday, September 14, schools K-12 may offer in-school services for small cohorts of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), students requiring instruction for English as a Second Language (ESL) or students needing assessments or specialized in-school services, as long as the school is able to fully implement the Health Officer’s re-opening protocols.

“One could argue that our youngest students, those in transitional kindergarten through second grade, are not being served well by distance learning,” adds Kuo. “They should be on this list as well.”

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Dr. Nagel is bilingual, bicultural Spanish-speaking and is available for interviews.

The American Academy of Pediatrics California Chapter 2 (AAP-CA2) is an organization of 1,500 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. The AAP-CA2 serves the counties of Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura.

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