



Southern California Chapter 2

Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura

Press release

Pediatricians call for California schools to open immediately

LOS ANGELES, CA (February 3, 2021)

Pediatricians have been unwavering in our support for the safe re-opening of schools during this pandemic. As recent studies document that schools have re-opened safely during the pandemic elsewhere, we are dismayed that millions of children across California are suffering and experiencing the negative impacts of prolonged school closures.

The Los Angeles County Office of Education reports that less than 10% of K-12 students currently experience any in-person education. A large majority of the 1.5 million students in LA County has not been physically in a classroom in nearly a year. This sad consequence of the pandemic should be addressed immediately with the re-opening of schools.

Data continue to accumulate showing that school attendance does not increase viral transmission in the community. Similar to other countries, school attendance is not an important source of community spread in the U.S., and within-school transmission is very rare. These conclusions are noted both in a January 2021 [report](#) in the Journal of the American Medical Association (U.S. data) and a December 2020 [report](#) on schools and COVID-19 from 17 European countries. Schools are safe when adherence to mitigation practices are in place such as mask wearing, hand hygiene, social distancing, and limitation of potentially higher-risk extracurricular activities. A year into the pandemic, and after great effort and expense, schools know how to implement mitigation. Preparations for most have been ongoing for months and health departments have already performed thousands of on-site inspections in the state in anticipation of school openings. Targeted COVID testing and staff vaccination are useful adjuncts to school reopening, but not a prerequisite.

“We know how to keep teachers, staff and children safe on school campuses,” says Dr. Kenneth Zangwill, pediatric infectious diseases specialist at Harbor-UCLA. “Hundreds of schools and school districts have been able to do this in other parts of the country.”

The prolonged physical absence of our children from the classroom continues to accelerate educational inequities and the negative impacts on the emotional and mental health of all students. A recent survey of over 500 Los Angeles teachers – queried 10 months into distance learning – reported that “low levels of student attendance and engagement are alarming and a lack of access is still creating barriers, with our youngest and more vulnerable populations most [impacted](#).” The emotional and mental impacts on children related to social isolation, anxiety, lack of structure, and visual learning fatigue are well-documented. Suicidality among teenagers is now an active area of investigation.

“Schools should open immediately,” says Dr. Alice Kuo, Executive Board member of the Southern California Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Professor of Pediatrics at UCLA. “We are causing undue harm to millions of children by keeping schools closed for this long.”

Re-opening schools is extremely important. Doing so immediately will jumpstart the process towards addressing the negative impacts distance learning has wrought on children and families. Many public and private schools are open throughout the country based on the science of virus transmission and the reality of educational and emotional impacts of closed schools. On behalf of 1,500 pediatricians throughout Southern California, we call for our state and local leaders to work quickly and definitively to open schools.

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The Southern California Chapter 2 of the American Academy of Pediatrics 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.

AAP Southern California Chapter 2 (AAP-CA2)

Chapter2@aapca2.org

(818) 422-9877

www.aapca2.org