

Louisiana Chapter

INCORPORATED IN LOUISIANA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Statement on School Re-Opening Issued: June 25, 2020

Representing pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists throughout the state, the Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (LA AAP) is first and foremost concerned with the health, safety and well-being of children as school systems debate school re-openings this fall. We applaud the decision made by the Louisiana Department of Education's (LDOE) and the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to close schools in March to protect the health of children, families and communities in Louisiana and we commend the efforts of teacher and educators during that challenging transition. LA AAP offers the following support and guidance during this unprecedented time as LDOE, BESE and state education leaders face the task of providing guidelines to more than 70 school districts serving over 1300 schools.

As experts in children's health and development, pediatricians provide crucial insight into the rapidly changing recommendations for school openings, as well as guidance addressing children with special healthcare needs, children's mental health and wellbeing, and overall support for child development. Therefore, in addition to the points below, the LA AAP urges LDOE, BESE and state education leaders to consult with their network of pediatricians which includes pediatric infectious diseases specialists.

LA AAP strongly feels that schools should make every effort to open in the fall with appropriate steps to lessen risks for children, teachers and support staff. We agree with the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) guidelines creating phases based on COVID19 morbidity and mortality data to determine when and how schools are allowed to open.

There is some good news about COVID-19. It is becoming increasingly clear that children are much less affected by the virus than adults. Children under 18 make up less than 5% of the confirmed cases in Louisiana and only 5.2% of cases in the US. Those who test positive are less likely to be hospitalized or to die. Furthermore, current international research suggests that children are not the main spreaders of the disease and may not be as infectious as adults. While we are encouraged by these facts, COVID-19 has had troubling effects on children in terms of isolation and loss of community, anxiety, depression and suicide. It is crucial to recognize that the epidemiology for COVID-19 is not the same for children as it is for adults and may require different guidance.

Children not only rely on schools for education but also for socialization, nutrition, physical activity and many small daily challenges and successes that help them develop and mature. As LDOE, BESE and state education leaders create reopening guidelines and guidance for schools, LA AAP encourages plans to be based on information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) but also to be flexible. Research and recommendations continue to rapidly evolve as information is learned from schools opening outside the United States. AAP and CDC recommendations are based on the most up to date research available, and draw upon the expertise of a wide variety of

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child health specialists to ensure that the whole child is considered. The LA AAP encourages the ability to adjust plans as new research and guidance becomes available.

The LA AAP believes it is also critical that LDOE, BESE and state education leaders recognize that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to reopening, as each district, school and student is different. School reopening guidelines must be flexible to allow local school districts and health departments, with community input, to further develop road maps that meet their unique needs, within the boundaries of CDC and AAP guidelines.

Finally, when considering contingency plans for a return to remote learning when COVID19 rates increase again as expected, the LA AAP urges plans into take into account child development, children with special needs and families with low parental education or English proficiency. Younger children, children with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or 504 plans, and children whose parents are not able to help them with remote learning may not get the same benefit as other children and have a high risk of falling further behind. Schools should consider all possible ways to continue in-person for those families most in need.

LA AAP recognizes that these are only a fraction of the multitude of issues to be addressed as LDOE, BESE and state education leaders consider the best and safest ways to reopen schools. We strongly encourage ongoing communications with the LA AAP so we can help provide the most up-to-date specialized guidance focusing on child health, development, mental health and special needs. We are eager to provide ongoing support, connect schools to pediatricians in their area, and help in any way we can to protect the health and wellbeing of children in Louisiana. Please reach out to our Executive Director – Ashley Politz at ashley.politz@laaap.org or at (225) 505-7611- with any questions or to get connected to local experts.

AAP School Reopening Considerations:

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

CDC Considerations for Schools:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>

About the Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

The Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics represents nearly 800 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialist throughout the state with a mission to advocate for all children in Louisiana. For more information, visit www.laaap.org.