

# Louisiana Chapter

INCORPORATED IN LOUISIANA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



## **Updated: Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Statement on School Re-Opening Issued: July 21, 2020**

The Louisiana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (LA AAP) represents pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists throughout the state. As school systems discuss when and how to start school this fall, the LA AAP urges Louisiana's education leaders to make decisions and recommendations that are based on available science and in a manner that is safe and equitable for students, teachers and staff. Systems must be flexible enough to adapt to the rapidly changing scientific knowledge about COVID-19.

As experts in children's health and development, pediatricians can provide crucial insight into the rapidly changing recommendations for school openings, as well as guidance addressing the needs of 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 the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH), the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and state education leaders to consult with their network of pediatricians which includes pediatric infectious diseases specialists.

LA AAP offers the following support and guidance during this unprecedented time as LDH, LDOE, BESE and state education leaders face the task of providing guidelines to more than 70 school districts serving over 1300 schools.

LA AAP believes strongly in the importance of being back in school physically as much as possible but stresses that decisions about when and how to return in-person should be grounded in data on the prevalence of the virus and on the trajectory of viral transmission in a community. Additionally, decisions must take into account the ability of the school to ensure a safe environment for their students, teachers and staff in an equitable manner.

Children not only rely on schools for education but also for socialization, nutrition, safety and physical activity, mental health support and support services that cannot easily be replicated virtually. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts of school closures on children from the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, anxiety, depression and suicide. This places children and adolescents at considerable risk of morbidity and, in some cases, mortality. 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.

As LDH, LDOE, BESE and state education leaders create reopening guidelines and guidance for schools, LA AAP encourages these 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 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 LDH, 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

# Louisiana Chapter

INCORPORATED IN LOUISIANA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



must be flexible to allow local school districts and health departments to further develop road maps that meet their unique needs, within the boundaries of CDC and AAP guidelines which rest on the current level of SARS-COVID-19 circulation within a community and the recent trajectory of cases. Furthermore, plans at the local level should consider input from school leaders, local health experts, educators and parents.

Finally, when considering contingency plans for a return to remote learning, the LA AAP urges that plans take into account child development, children with special needs and families with low parental education, limited English proficiency and the family's ability to access internet and equipment required for remote learning. 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 the safest way possible to continue in-person learning for those families most in need.

LA AAP acknowledges there are many unknowns and an ever-growing list of issues to be addressed by LDH, LDOE, BESE and state education leaders as they consider the best and safest ways to reopen schools. School policies should be guided by supporting the overall health and well-being of all children, adolescents, their families, and their communities and should be consistently communicated to families. We strongly suggest considering adding communications in languages other than English, as needed, based on the languages spoken in the community, to avoid marginalization of parents/guardians who are of limited English proficiency or do not speak English at all.

LA AAP is available to serve as a partner to 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](mailto: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](http://www.laaap.org).