

Van Do-Reynoso, MPH, PhD Director
Suzanne Jacobson, CPA Chief Financial Officer
Paige Batson, MA, PHN, RN Deputy Director
Douglas Metz, DPM, MPH Deputy Director
Polly Baldwin, MD, MPH Medical Director
Henning Ansorg, M.D. Health Officer
Darrin Eisenbarth Deputy Director

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Reopening Santa Barbara Schools

We are all committed to continued learning and growth for our children during the COVID-19 pandemic. We prefer in-person instruction, as we know it is the best way for children to learn. At the same time, it must be safe to provide in-person instruction.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has identified six things to measure in each community across the state to determine if it is safe for in-person instruction. The key measures focus on the rate positive COVID cases in the community, the capacity of our hospitals and of our Intensive Care Units.

When a County does not meet the threshold or standard set by CDPH in any of the monitored areas, only distance learning will be allowed. This is because the number of positive COVID cases is too high or the capacity of our hospitals and ICU's is too low. CDPH has set a guideline that each County must meet all of the standards for 14 consecutive days to reopen for in-person instruction. Santa Barbara County does not meet the threshold for the COVID case rate per 100,000 and the testing positivity percentage. Santa Barbara County has not met all six metrics since June 6, 2020. We are not able to reopen schools for in-person instruction.

Santa Barbara County has consistently exceeded the threshold in two areas:

- Case rate per 100,000 (over 14 days); the threshold is less than 100
- Testing positivity rate (over 7 days); the threshold is less than 8%

How can we get our kids back to in-person learning? The entire community has to collaborate to lower the number of COVID cases. This comes down to all of us doing the three things we know work to limit transmission of the disease:

- Keep physical distance of 6 feet from people who do not live with us.
- Use cloth face coverings when in public.
- Perform regular handwashing and cleaning of our environment.
- Avoid all gatherings (except with your own household members) and mixing of groups of people
- Avoid all travel

If 100% of our population wore masks, kept 6' distance and stopped gatherings it would lower the number of new cases and halt the spread of the virus. We can do this!

CDPH has created a waiver option for elementary schools to open for in-person classes. The option for a waiver is based on what we have learned about this disease. We know that young children, those under 10 years of age, do not transmit the disease at the same rate as adults and they do not get as seriously ill.

The waiver process requires a School Superintendent to consult with Labor, parents and community stakeholders. The Superintendent then requests a waiver from the County Health Officer. After those steps, the Health Officer would review the local epidemiology data with CDPH and get their approval to grant a waiver. It is not just a personal decision by the local Health Officer. Given Santa Barbara County's high rate of daily new cases and high positivity rate in testing, a waiver is not currently an option for the near future.

Santa Barbara County must significantly reduce new infections countywide to get our children back to in-person instruction in schools. In order to achieve this, all of us need to change our behaviors drastically as outlined above.

RESOURCES

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Schools%20Reopening%20Recommendations.pdf>

<https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-schools.pdf>

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID19CountyDataTable.aspx>