

Association of Bay Area Health Officials

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Bay Area Health Officers Reaffirm Support for In-Person School

As Bay Area Health Officials, we are excited that more than a million Kindergarten-12th grade students are returning to school for in-person learning this fall across the wider San Francisco Bay Area. In the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, and the City of Berkeley, many children are back in the classroom for the first time since early 2020.

This summer's surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalization due to the spread of the Delta variant is causing people to feel cautious about the return to school. We know that when rates of COVID are high in our communities, cases will appear at schools, just as they do in other settings. However, with effective protocols in place – including universal indoor masking, vaccinations of eligible persons, testing, good hand hygiene, staying home when sick and proper ventilation – the data shows that these multiple layers of defense can stop the spread of COVID in school settings.

In considering the many benefits to children, Bay Area Health Officials [reaffirm the joint Bay Area Health Officials' statement from June](#), endorse the recent [statement from Bay Area County Superintendents of Schools](#), and continue to firmly support a safe return to the classroom.

The lack of in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic not only disrupted education, but it also weakened social supports and harmed the mental health of students. The risks and benefits of returning to in-person learning are clearer now than any other time during this pandemic – we must all continue to do everything possible to keep kids safely attending their schools.

While children can get COVID-19, severe disease among kids is uncommon and deaths are exceedingly rare. Transmission can happen in any setting, including in schools, but children are often exposed to COVID-19 at home or in social settings where safety practices vary. Cases identified by school testing programs may often be unrelated classroom exposure. In Contra Costa County, we are seeing COVID-19 cases among children but at rates generally lower than among adults and lower than last winter's surge.

The [State's K-12 Schools Guidance for the 2021-22 School Year](#) is practical guidance that emphasizes universal application of the most important safety measures while also offering flexibility for different approaches to meet the needs and capacities of a broad range of schools and districts seeking to safely keep children in classrooms.

School leaders have worked hard to implement this Guidance and are ready to welcome students back. Health Officials continue to monitor the data closely and we will work across the region and the state to adapt when needed.

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