

As schools plan to reopen, pediatricians offer guidelines

July 21 2020, by Scottie Day

As we continue into uncharted waters during the coronavirus pandemic, reopening schools safely requires careful planning. Many schools are overcrowded and understaffed, which makes implementing measures such as distancing and cleaning difficult. The American Academy of Pediatrics has outlined some guidelines for states and school districts to consider when planning a safe environment for students, teachers and staff.

First and foremost, we must advocate for students' needs. The success of non-traditional learning and the availability of students' parents to facilitate the learning varies across racial, social and economic demographics; some students will be better prepared for the [school](#) year than others. Practice patience and compassion and work with schools and pediatricians to identify and accommodate special needs.

It can be difficult to get [younger children](#) to practice social distancing. Schedule as much outdoor time as possible and cohort classes so that children stay in the same groups. If students are wearing [face masks](#) and are asymptomatic, spacing desks three feet apart may be as beneficial as placing them six feet apart.

Enforcing social distance in common areas such as hallways and cafeterias can also be a challenge. Stagger pick up and drop off times as well as class times to reduce the number of students in the hallway during class changes. Designate hallways as one-way with directional arrows on the floor and consider eliminating lockers to discourage

congestion and congregation.

Cohort students for mealtimes and consider having students eat in their classrooms or outdoor spaces. Food insecurity is another factor to consider, as more students may qualify for free or reduced meals. Plans should be made prior to the start of the [school year](#) for how students participating in free- and reduced- meal programs will receive food in the event of a school closure or if they have to stay home because of illness or isolation.

Pretesting and screenings are encouraged but can be difficult to execute on a large scale with limited staff and resources. Parents should screen their children before school and keep them home if their temperature exceeds 100.1 degrees or if they exhibit other symptoms of COVID-19. It is important that schools develop a rapid response for students and staff who develop a fever during school hours.

Immunization requirements and well-child visits should not be deferred because of coronavirus. Even though they aren't generally required, [school districts](#) should encourage students to get flu shots.

The latest AAP guidelines articulate that our main goal is for students to be present in school; however, we also recognize that COVID-19 remains a very real, active threat to our community health. The decisions on when and how to reopen need to consider a variety of factors, and a big one is the level of virus in the community. It will take a group effort, which includes engagement and input from schools, parents, local pediatricians, state and local government, and the community. Together we can determine the best approach to caring for and prioritizing the education of our future generations.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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