

Arizona Chapter

INCORPORATED IN ARIZONA

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Position on School Reopening

(July 26, 2021) – The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AzAAP) and its membership of over 1,100 pediatric health care professionals in the state are dedicated to promoting the health, safety, and welfare of children. AzAAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for school plans should start with the goal of keeping students safe and physically present in schools. Arizona’s decisions regarding return to school should be guided by data and science and take into consideration the current community spread of COVID-19. Arizona also should provide funding to support schools so they can provide appropriate safety measures for students and staff. AzAAP advises that legislators, schools, and education leaders follow current guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) for COVID-19 prevention. All school COVID-19 policies should consider the following key principles to mitigate transmission:

All eligible school staff and students should receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- AzAAP also urges families to call their pediatrician and have children caught up on all vaccines they may have missed during the pandemic. This includes getting a vaccine to protect against influenza, which, like COVID-19, can cause severe illness and death.

All students greater than 2 years old and all school staff should wear face masks indoors at school (unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit use).

- A significant portion of the student population is not yet eligible for vaccination. Recognizing requirements from the state government, the AzAAP continues to recommend all students and staff continue to wear masks indoors.
- The vaccine status of students, teachers, and staff is difficult to monitor. Therefore, **universal masking** is the best and most effective strategy to create consistent messages, expectations, enforcement, and compliance without the added burden of needing to monitor vaccination status.
- Universal masking in schools reduces the risk of COVID-19 spread among students and staff when vaccination rates are low in the surrounding school community, especially if more infectious variants are prevalent.
- In general, students and school staff do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, particularly in areas of substantial to high transmission, CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded

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outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

Management of students and staff who have potentially been exposed to COVID-19 is critical.

- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and should consult with their healthcare provider regarding testing and care.
- Unvaccinated students and school staff who have been exposed to confirmed cases of COVID-19 should be expected to follow the quarantine recommendations of their local public health department.
- Asymptomatic vaccinated students and staff may be exempted from quarantine.

The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AZAAP) continues to urge a balanced, collaborative approach to school reopening involving educators, public health officials, pediatricians, mental health professionals, and parents. Arizona's pediatricians would like to help local, county, and state schools achieve the delicate balance between controlling spread of COVID-19 with fulfilling the optimal educational, nutritional, fitness, and mental health needs of children. AZAAP pediatrician leaders are available to speak with legislators, public health and education leaders, and other state officials to answer questions about the specific recommendations which focus on mitigating COVID-19 risks.