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Arizona Pediatric QI Institute
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Reach Out and Read

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

Arizona's pediatricians are dedicated to promoting the health, safety and welfare of children. While many Arizona schools did an outstanding job adjusting to a virtual learning environment under urgent circumstances, virtual learning is not comparable to in-person learning. In particular, younger children and those students with special needs rely heavily on having a constantly-available, skilled adult at home to support their child's virtual learning, and few families have the experience, resources and time to fulfill this role. Schools also provide important support services, including meals, mental health support, therapies for students in special education, English language learner instruction, and school-based health services.

We have seen first-hand the effects on kids of isolation and loss of community from the closure of schools. In-person learning is central not just to education, but to a child's developmental, behavioral and emotional wellbeing. Sadly, over the past few months we have seen increases in anxiety, depression, and suicidality among our patients. We urge parents to contact their pediatrician if their child is experiencing any of these symptoms. To make sure children return to school ready to learn, we also urge parents to be sure their children have had their well-child visits and their immunizations are up to date.

Arizona's decisions regarding school openings should be guided by science, take into consideration community spread of COVID-19, and include financial support for schools. Because Arizona is a geographically, economically and ethnically diverse state with many school systems, each school system needs to be able to tailor their approach to reopening to their own community. Flexible strategies which may require intermittent closures, phased reopening, and isolation protocols will need to be developed by each school district.

The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AzAAP) urges 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.

RESOURCES:

- National AAP recommendations for return to in-person education in schools: <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/>
- Return to School during COVID-19: Information for Parents: <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/health-issues/conditions/covid-19/pages/return-to-school-during-covid-19.aspx>
- Pediatricians, Educators and Superintendents Issue a Joint Statement on Safe Return to Schools: <https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2020/pediatricians-educators-and-superintendents-urge-a-safe-return-to-school-this-fall/>