Governor Newsom Announces Federal Approval of Medicaid Funding for Expanded COVID-19 Testing for Low-Income Students

First-in-the-nation waiver approved by Biden-Harris Administration to allow Medicaid funding for voluntary COVID-19 testing in schools

SACRAMENTO – On the heels of announcing a $6.6 billion school reopening agreement with the Legislature, Governor Gavin Newsom today announced that the Biden-Harris Administration has approved California's request to utilize Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) funding to provide voluntary COVID-19 testing for low-income students covered by the program, further supporting schools in underserved communities to reopen for in-person instruction.

"I am grateful to our federal partners for approving our request to expand testing for low-income students to ensure schools can reopen safely in underserved neighborhoods that are bearing the brunt of pandemic hardships," said Governor Newsom. "Our top priority is getting students back in the classroom to not only meet their learning needs, but also their mental health and social-emotional needs."

Given the unprecedented nature of the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency, on December 24, 2020, the California Department of Health Care Services requested permission, using the federal demonstration authority, to provide COVID-19 testing in schools for Medi-Cal children in grades transitional kindergarten through 12. This request to the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has been approved retroactive to February 1, 2021, and will continue for 60 days after the end of the federal public health emergency.

Medi-Cal is the primary health care system for more than half of the state's population under the age of 20. For schools electing to implement COVID-19 testing as an additional mitigation layer – especially those serving communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic – the state and federal governments will now shoulder much of the costs. Medi-Cal provides coverage to 50-55 percent of school-aged children in California.

"As a pediatrician and father, I know schools are a vital place for our kids where in-person learning has a positive impact on their overall health and well-being," said California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. "Further leveraging our state Medicaid program to increase access to testing will not only help us to reopen schools, but also ensure that testing becomes even more accessible for underserved students."

The Governor, Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon on Monday announced a $6.6 billion budget package to accelerate the safe return to in-person instruction across California and empower schools to immediately expand academic, mental health and social-emotional supports, including over the summer. The package builds on the state's ongoing efforts to accelerate safe school reopenings, which have included the delivery of three months of PPE and safety supplies to all schools at no cost, direct support to over 1,000 schools in 41 counties to implement COVID-19 testing and direct technical assistance to over 300 school districts.

For more information about safe returns to in-person instruction, please visit schools.covid19.ca.gov.

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For more information about testing in schools, please visit testing.covid19.ca.gov/school-testing.

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