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NCDHHS

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NCDHHS Updates Guidance for K-12 Schools, Instructs Schools to Open for In-Person Instruction

Continued research shows mitigation measures allow safe in-person learning, low transmission among students and teachers

K-12 schools are expected to open for in-person instruction for K-12 students following the StongSchoolsNC health guidance released today by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

RALEIGH

K-12 schools are expected to open for in-person instruction for K-12 students following the StrongSchoolsNC (https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/Strong-Schools-NC-Public-Health-Toolkit.pdf?mc_cid=36f5fa51d5&mc_eid=764de28299) health

guidance released today by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Recognizing the growing harms to children who are out of school and relying solely on remote instruction – including negative impacts on academics, mental health and food insecurity – the department's updated guidance instructs schools to offer in-person learning to the fullest extent possible while following all public health protocols.

Schools should only use remote learning options for higher-risk students and for families opting for remote learning for their children.

Since last updating its guidance on Feb. 2, the state has seen continued improvement in COVID-19 metrics and trends that indicate a decline in rates of new cases in many communities. On Feb. 12, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released operational strategy for K-12 schools (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html?mc_cid=36f5fa51d5&mc_eid=764de28299), noting the critical importance of school reopening for achieving the benefits of in-person learning and key support services.

"Extensive research tells us we can bring students back to the classroom with the right measures in place," said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy K. Cohen, M.D. "And students need in-person school not only for academics, but to learn social skills, get reliable meals, and to continue to grow and thrive."

Consistent with the CDC's recommendations, the department's updated guidance reinforces that all schools K-12 should be open to

in-person instruction while still maintaining all mitigation measures, including the requirement for six feet of social distancing for middle and high school students only. Studies indicate that younger children appear to be less likely to spread COVID-19 to others than older teens and adults.

Schools continue to have flexibility in how they choose to operationally implement the public health requirements in the Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit. (https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/Strong-Schools-NC-Public-Health-Toolkit.pdf?mc_cid=36f5fa51d5&mc_eid=764de28299)

The State Board of Education will vote tomorrow on whether to adopt the update.

This press release is related to: