



## Coronavirus Updates

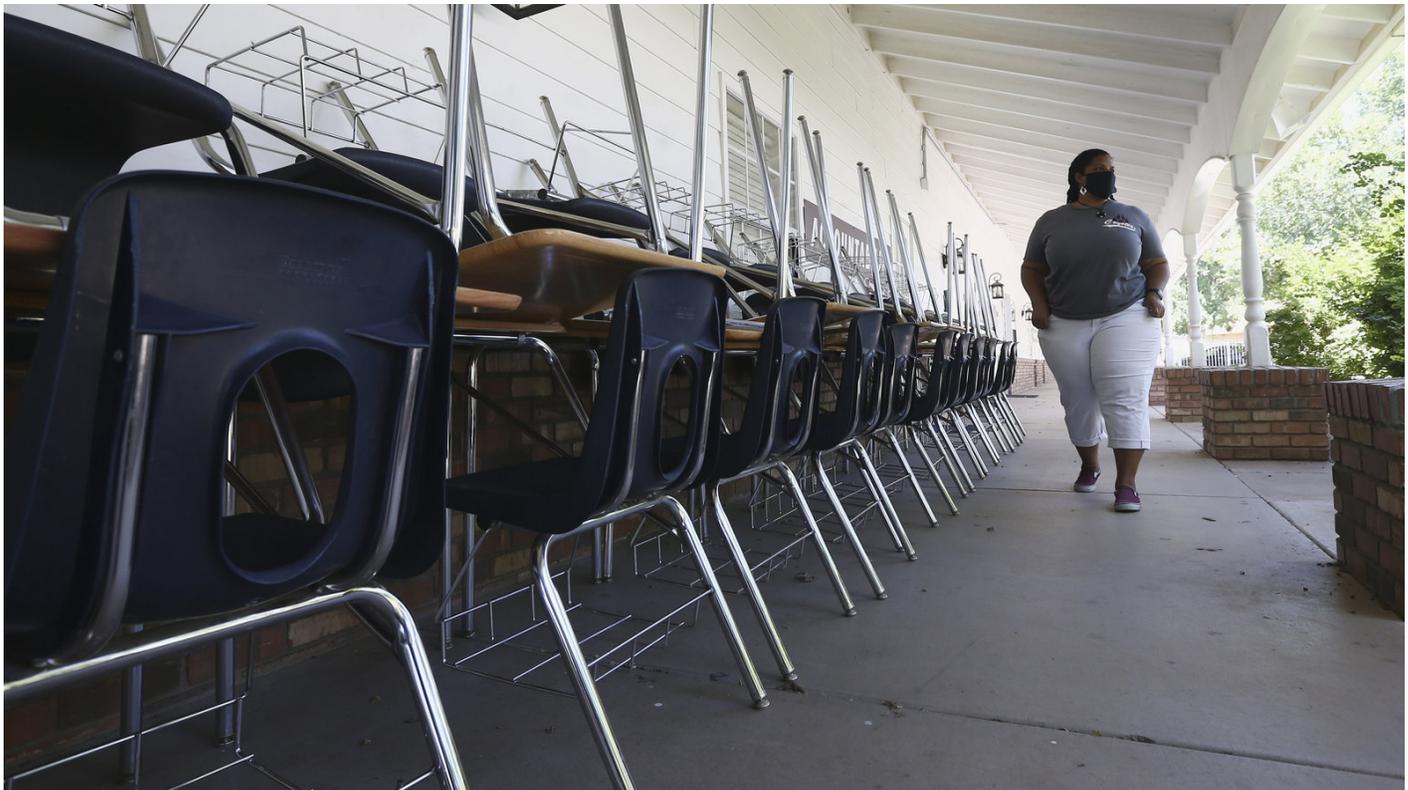
THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

# U.S. Pediatricians Call For In-Person School This Fall

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Kristina Washington, special education staff member at Desert Heights Preparatory Academy, walks past desks and chairs at the closed Glendale, Ariz., school in early June.

*Ross D. Franklin/AP*

The nation's pediatricians have come out with a strong statement in favor of bringing

children back to the classroom this fall wherever and whenever they can do so safely. The American Academy of Pediatrics' guidance "strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school."

The guidance says "schools are fundamental to child and adolescent development and well-being."

The AAP cites "mounting evidence" that transmission of the coronavirus by young children is uncommon, partly because they are less likely to contract it in the first place.



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On the other hand, the AAP argues that based on the nation's experience this spring, remote learning is likely to result in severe learning loss and increased social isolation. Social isolation, in turn, can breed serious social, emotional and health issues: "child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation." Furthermore, these impacts will be visited more severely on Black and brown children, as well as low-income children and those with learning disabilities.

The guidance for returning to in-person schooling includes recommendations about physical distancing, cleaning and disinfection, hand-washing, and using outdoor spaces whenever possible.

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The AAP argues that offering elementary school children the opportunity to go to school every day should be given due consideration over spacing guidelines if capacity is an issue: "Schools should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a 6-foot spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative."



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And, it also argues that masks are probably not practical for children younger than middle school unless they can wear a mask without increased face touching.

The guidelines do note that adult school staff are more at risk compared to young children and need to be able to distance from other adults as much as possible — no in-person faculty meetings, no class visits by parents. And they emphasize the need to make accommodations for students who are medically fragile or have special health care needs or disabilities.

However, these guidelines don't necessarily address the health concerns of America's teachers or their willingness to return to in-person teaching. Federal data show nearly

a third of teachers are over 50, putting them in a higher risk category when it comes to the disease.

Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, for example, recently announced its reopening plans, offering families a choice between two days a week of in-person classes or an all-remote schedule plus extra intervention on a third day for students who need it. The county's three educator unions resisted, arguing in a statement that remote learning should continue. "Our educators are overwhelmingly not comfortable returning to schools," said Tina Williams, president of Fairfax County Federation of Teachers. "They fear for their lives, the lives of their students and the lives of their families."

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