California Department of Public Health releases updated school reopening guidance for 2020–21 school year

The California Department of Public Health today released an update to its “COVID-19 and Reopening In-Person Instruction Framework & Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools in California, 2020–2021 School Year.” The document notes the new version consolidates content from other CDPH COVID-19 and school-related guidance and supersedes previous CDPH COVID-19 and Cal/OSHA school guidance. Also launched today is the CA Safe Schools for All Hub, which aims to provide the support and accountability to establish a clear path to minimize in-school transmissions and enable a phased return to in-person instruction.

In addition to these releases, an all-county letter was sent providing greater clarity and highlighting key issues raised by schools that are currently open or plan to reopen in the near term; Guidance for COVID-19 School Reopening Status Reporting, which says that, “Beginning January 25, 2021, every local educational agency (school district, county office of education, and charter school) and private school in California shall notify the California Department of Public Health whether it is serving students in-person;” and Guidance for COVID-19 Case Reporting By Schools.

CDPH guidance
In addition to consolidating and updating prior state public health guidance and orders related to schools, the updated guidance provides both K-12 schools and local health departments additional information for providing in-person instruction, including:

1. Criteria and processes for school reopenings under the Blueprint for a Safer Economy framework.
2. Considerations intended to help school leaders plan for and prepare to resume in-person instruction including steps to take when a student or staff member is found to have COVID-19 symptoms during the school day and while participating in before and after school programs.
3. Response to confirmed COVID-19 infections when: a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a student or staff member; and a cluster or outbreak of COVID-19 at a
school is being investigated.
4. Physical distancing in classrooms.
5. Implementation of stable groups of students and staff.

The document does not modify or supersede the “Guidance Related to Cohorts for Children and Youth” (first issued on Aug. 25, 2020; last updated Sept. 4, 2020), which applies to groups of children and youth in controlled, supervised, and indoor environments. The Cohort Guidance continues to allow schools that are not permitted to reopen under state or local public health directives and schools (and any grades at schools) that have not yet reopened if permitted to do so to serve students in-person in small, stable cohorts, as specified in the Cohort Guidance.

This updated guidance supersedes the following previous guidance:

- COVID-19 Industry Guidance: Schools and School-Based Programs (first published in May 2020; last updated August 3, 2020)
- COVID-19 and Reopening In-Person Learning Framework for K-12 Schools in California, 2020-2021 School Year (July 17, 2020)
- The Elementary Education Waiver process and the associated School Waiver Letter and Cover Form and Local Health Officer Waiver Notice Form (all issued on Aug. 3, 2020)

CA Safe School for All Hub
This new resource aims to provide the support and accountability to establish a clear path to minimize in-school transmissions and enable, first, a phased return to in-person instruction, and then ongoing safe in-person instruction. The CA Safe Schools for All Hub consolidates key resources and information related to COVID-19 and schools. New resources will be added to the Hub on a routine basis. The hub also contains links to information about the Safe Schools for All plan, including a summary, rationale and science behind the plan.