



Mendocino County Health & Human Services Agency

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

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Press Release

Not for op-ed

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mendocino County Health Officer Guidance on School Closures

County Health Officer Dr. Noemi Doohan is not recommending closing Mendocino County schools at this time. The Public Health Division has been actively responding to the threat of COVID-19 since early January 2020 and today there are ZERO known cases of COVID-19 in our County. At this time there is no evidence of community spread in Mendocino County or our neighboring counties. However, the Bay Area is experiencing outbreaks of COVID-19 and we recognize the threat this presents to Mendocino County based on our proximity to the Bay Area.

The wellbeing of the children in Mendocino County and the essential role schools play in their lives and our society is of the utmost importance. Any decision we make for the health of our children must be grounded in science. For this reason the County Health Officer looks to the CDC for guidance in decision-making. This week the CDC issued guidance regarding considerations for school closures. The CDC recommends that school closures be considered when there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school facility or when there is evidence of local community spread of COVID-19. The guidance document is attached and can be viewed online here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>.

We recognize that numerous Bay Area counties ordered school closures this week due to community spread of COVID-19. Available data indicate that only longer school closures of 8-20 weeks, accompanied by social distancing, might lessen the spread of

the virus if it's present in the community. There is a role for brief school closures in response to school-based cases of COVID-19 for decontamination.

We want to support our schools during this trying time and the decisions schools have made for their students' wellbeing. For schools that have decided to close in Mendocino County, we recommend moving up spring break and taking this time to disinfect the school, teach and reinforce healthy hygiene and strengthen COVID-19 mitigation planning. For schools that haven't made a determination regarding closures, Dr. Doohan suggests learning from the Bay Area approach. Consider the recent actions in San Mateo County where school operations are being modified to allow for certain core functions of the schools to continue alongside at-home learning.

As much as possible, children should be allowed to carry on with their education and normal activities. We encourage all school officials to carefully review and follow the CDC's guidance for Considerations for School Closure, as well as Public Health's recommendations for canceling certain non-essential gatherings and events, which also apply to schools.

Mendocino County Public Health is sensitive to the schools that remain open and those that choose to close their doors. We support looking at creative educational options to continue the best care and education for our children.

Governor Gavin Newsom today issued an executive order ensuring California public school districts retain state funding even in the event of physical closure. The order directs school districts to use those state dollars to fund distance learning and high quality educational opportunities, provide school meals and, as practical, arrange for the supervision for students during school hours.

The order provides that even if schools close temporarily because of COVID-19, school districts must:

- Continue delivering high-quality educational opportunities to students through other options, distance learning and independent study;

- Safely provide school meals through the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option, consistent with the requirements of the California Department of Education and U.S. Department of Agriculture;
- To the extent practical, arrange for supervision for students during ordinary school hours;
- Continue to pay employees.

The full executive order can be viewed at <https://www.gov.ca.gov/>.

Please visit www.mendocinocounty.org for the latest local news on COVID-19. For general health related questions or other concerns regarding COVID-19, please call Mendocino County's Call Center at (707) 234-6052 or email callcenter@mendocinocounty.org. The call center will be open during regular business hours, Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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