



CDC-California K-12 Schools Guidance Crosswalk

February 16, 2021

On February 12, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under President Biden issued guidance on safely resuming in-person instruction in K-12 schools. The CDC guidance is a set of non-mandatory recommendations and does not supersede existing state or local guidance. As state and local officials study the CDC approach and recommendations, this document is intended to serve as an initial crosswalk between the new [CDC guidance](#) and [existing California guidance](#).

The CDC guidance is highly aligned with California's approach. Where there are differences, California's health and safety standards for school staff and students are generally more cautious.

Phased Approach

CDC: “[A] phased mitigation approach emphasizes in-person learning modes for younger students throughout all levels of community transmission.”

California: “Phased reopening plans” should “gradually allow[] for specified grades . . . to resume in-person learning, beginning with the youngest and most disproportionately impacted students.”

Community Transmission

California takes a more cautious approach with regard to first-time school openings when community transmission is relatively high. The following chart summarizes some of the key comparisons:

Community Transmission	CDC	California
All	“[S]chools that are already open . . . can remain open”	“[S]chools who have already opened . . . may remain open”
0 – 1.3 cases per day	All schools may open	All schools may open
1.4 – 7 cases per day	All schools may open	All schools may open
7.1 – 14.1 cases per day	All schools may open	Only elementary schools may open
Greater than 14.1 cases per day	Only elementary schools may open	Elementary schools may open, unless greater than 25 cases per day

California's community transmission thresholds are based on recent [studies](#) indicating minimal school-related transmission in communities with 15 – 29 cases per day, the [recommendation](#) from the Harvard Global Health Institute, and similar approaches taken by other states (e.g., [Oregon](#), [Colorado](#), [Washington](#)).

Reopening Priorities

CDC: “K-12 schools should be the last settings to close after all other mitigation measures in the community have been employed, and the first to reopen when they can do so safely.”



California: “As communities emerge out of the COVID-19 surge, getting more students back in the classroom should be at the top of the to-do list.” (Governor Newsom, December 30, 2020).

Basic Mitigation Strategies

CDC: “Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented mitigation strategies have been able to safely open for in-person instruction and remain open.”

California: “Key mitigation strategies, studied in multiple settings and used successfully in schools nationally and internationally, allow for safe in-person instruction.”

Masks

CDC: “Require consistent and correct use of face masks, by all students, teachers, and staff to prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission through respiratory droplets.”

California: Requirement since July 2020. Expanded to TK-2 students in January 2021.

Physical Distancing

CDC: “Physical distancing (at least 6 feet) should be maximized to the greatest extent possible.”

California: “Distance teacher and other staff desks at least 6 feet away from student and other staff desks. Distance student chairs at least 6 feet away from one another, except where 6 feet of distance is not possible after a good-faith effort has been made. Upon request by the local health department and/or State Safe Schools Team, the superintendent should be prepared to demonstrate that good faith effort, including an effort to consider all outdoor/indoor space options and hybrid learning models.”

Routine COVID-19 Testing

CDC: “Evidence suggests that many K-12 schools that have strictly implemented mitigation strategies have been able to safely open for in-person instruction and remain open.” Additionally, “Some schools may also elect to use screening testing . . . as an additional layer of mitigation to complement mitigation strategies.”

California: “Empirically, schools that have successfully implemented the core mitigation strategies . . . are operating safely.” Additionally, “a range of potential testing approaches can be considered for implementation as part of a comprehensive safety strategy.”

Vaccines

CDC: “[O]fficials should consider giving high priority to teachers in early phases of vaccine distribution.” “Access to vaccination should not be considered a condition for reopening schools for in-person instruction.”

California: State guidelines give high priority to school staff, including teachers, designating them within the second phase. Approximately half of states do not.