

JOINT PRESS RELEASE



Sonoma County
Office of Education

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DHS, SCOE Recommend Temporary Suspension of In-Person Classes Following Spring Break

SANTA ROSA, CA – In a precautionary effort to further mitigate the spread of COVID-19, commonly known as the coronavirus, in Sonoma County and the state, Sonoma County Department of Health Services (DHS) and Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE), are recommending that Sonoma County school districts temporarily suspend in-person classes through at least March 27.

Most school districts are on spring break March 17-21, 2020, so these recommendations would be enacted the following week, beginning March 23, 2020. Under this guidance, students will remain home while staff will report to their school sites to provide extended at home learning opportunities and other support services for students.

The recommendation comes after thoughtful, deliberate consideration between the county health department and school officials. As County health officials continue to work with healthcare providers to test and evaluate for coronavirus, this precautionary step is part of a community-wide effort to practice social distancing and slow the spread of the virus.

“Schools are vital community hubs and service providers. This recommendation to postpone in-person classes was not made lightly,” said Dr. Steve Herrington, Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools. “We know that suspending classes creates a significant disruption to the lives of students, staff, and families. School districts have been diligently preparing for how to offer continuity of education, meals, and other vital services even if students are not physically at school.”

“Our priority in the midst of a Public Health Emergency is to protect all people living in our community,” said Barbie Robinson, Director, Sonoma County Department of Health Services. “Since day one of the coronavirus emergency, we have been working with our partners at the Sonoma County Office of Education to keep our children safe. We fully support this decision.”

Under this recommendation, each school district will work with DHS to determine the appropriate length of time to suspend given local community factors. Each district will set its own calendar and address extended at home learning activities for students.

Leaders of Sonoma County’s 40 school districts will meet with County Public Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase on Monday, March 16 to discuss these recommendations and how long in-person classes might be suspended for each school district. Updates will be provided to the public on specific school district plans after that. School closures will be reported through SCOE.

Schools have also been encouraged to identify meal service options for students during the time that in-person classes are suspended. They will be working with other food service agencies around the county to determine the best way to do so.

“I want to acknowledge the strength of our students, families, and staff throughout the numerous disasters that have closed school and impacted our community over the past few years,” said Dr. Herrington. “I feel for students who will be impacted by this necessary but difficult decision. Schools are working diligently with our public health department to ensure that classes can resume as soon as it is deemed to be in the best interest of the community.”

The County continues to encourage preventative measures whenever possible, including:

- Wash your hands frequently or use anti-viral sanitizer.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than your hands.
- Wash your hands every time you use a tissue for your nose.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with your hands.
- Clean any surface that is touched often, such as countertops or door handles.
- Limit close contact with those who are sick.
- If you are sick, quickly report your symptoms to your medical provider and stay away from others. You may need to stay home from work or school.
- Your medical provider may recommend using a face mask when you are near other people. However, face masks are not recommended for the public, as they do not provide protection from coronavirus.

For the latest information about the coronavirus in Sonoma County and advice from health experts on prevention and care, call 2-1-1, text your zip code to 898-211, or visit www.socoemergency.org.