

WCRIS Staff Notes

Thinking Ahead: COVID-19 Considerations for Re-Opening Your School Campus

There are so many great webinars and only so much time in the day. WCRIS provides notes below of an excellent webinar sponsored by the independent schools' National Business Officers Association (NBOA) on the re-opening of schools given COVID-19.

The April 22, 2020 webinar had two doctors, Dr. David Schulkin and Dr Michael Jaff, who provided expert guidance on how to best keep students safe in a classroom setting.

They said for the coming school year this fall, schools should prepare for life to NOT return to normal. Dr. Schulkin and Dr. Jaff both said "normalcy" will not be restored until there is either a vaccine or a viable treatment plan.

The doctors also discussed the research that scientist have about the virus. One limiting factor is that the virus is new and there is little research to help scientist find the best course of action.

How the COVID-19 virus affects children

The doctors made the point that historically pandemics affect the young and old. Currently children are going widely untouched. This is puzzling to the medical community. The doctors discussed the three theories that may help explain why.

The first theory has to do with the enzymes that the virus uses to travel to the respiratory system. Children whose lungs have not matured do not produce (or not in large enough quantities) the enzyme the virus uses to travel to the respiratory system.

The second theory, according to the doctors, is that some other coronavirus virus antibodies can have a negative effect on a person, rather than helping. Children have not lived long enough to acquire large amounts of coronavirus family antibodies, which means their immune system does not produce the negative effect.

The final theory is what the doctors think is actually happening. In an early study, they found that children do get COVID-19 but for an unknown reason, they show little to no symptoms. In some cases, a child will exhibit a mild sore throat and very low fever, or cold-like symptoms. Most parents will overlook these symptoms as allergies, especially in Spring. The doctors stressed that the children could be highly asymptomatic and still be a threat to the population.

Knowing this information, schools should be operating to prevent the spread of COVID-19 not only to protect children, but more importantly, to prevent the children from taking the virus back to their families and communities.

The Doctors' Recommendations for Schools:

- Students should be six feet apart in each direction. This will force classrooms to have fewer kids.
- Classes will need to be smaller in size. Schools should entertain the idea of staggering classrooms. For example: fourth grade Group A attends from 8-11 a.m. and Group B attends from 1- 4 pm. During and between each session the classrooms are disinfected;
- Schools should use gyms as a classroom or other non-traditional spaces that provide maximum social distancing;
- Implement specific student drop-off and pick-up times to limit the number of people gathering;
- Use more bus routes with fewer kids on them;
- Wear masks for the first 14 days in low case count areas;
- Implement a quarantine policy in the student and employee handbook;
- Conduct temperature checks of staff and students;
- Request proof of anti-body testing;
- Implement staggered passing periods, and bathroom breaks.

Closing Caveats

The doctors said many things are unknown. Information is unfolding daily as more is learned. Understanding of the virus will change. As a result, the above recommendations may change. Expect state and local health officials to provide guidance for when schools reopen.