

How would it work if OC needed to close a school?

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The [latest word from the county Health Care Agency](#) is there are no confirmed cases of community transmission of the COVID-19 virus in Orange County, and there are no recommendations to close local schools.

Still, some parents, educators and community members may be wondering how a school closure might work under these circumstances. So we've compiled a list of questions and answers based on information from the state Department of Education and other agencies.

Who would be responsible for closing a school?

According to the California Department of Education, any decision to close a school as a result of the coronavirus would be made by its local education agency — LEAs are typically districts but can be other agencies with authority over schools — in consultation with their respective county health agencies.

What level of COVID-19 exposure would prompt a school closure?

The [latest guidance from the California Department of Public Health](#) says if one student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 and has exposed others, school officials must work with the local health care agency to determine if a school closure is warranted and for what length of time.

Under what circumstances should students be kept home from school?

First and foremost, schools and districts must continue to protect the rights of all students from discrimination or any actions that could stigmatize groups based on race, national origin or ethnicity.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently expanded its travel advisory to include additional countries, assigning a Level 3 designation to Iran, Italy and South Korea, in addition to China. Simply put, anyone returning from countries on the Level 3 list should stay home from work and school and take social distancing precautions for 14 days from the time they left. The CDC has stated that students under self-quarantine should be excused from school during this period.

The HCA will notify a school or district if it is aware of any student that the agency has identified as high-risk who should be excluded from school. If the HCA has not notified your district, that means the HCA has not identified any high-risk students.

In circumstances where a district is aware of a student returning from a Level 3 country who has not voluntarily complied with the 14-day self-quarantine, OCDE recommends working collaboratively with the family toward a self-imposed quarantine. Again, the first priority must be to establish learning environments that ensure the safety and well-being of all students. For more information, read [OCDE's latest legal advisory](#).

If a school closes or students are unable to attend classes, how can schools and districts support teaching and learning?

Local districts are encouraged to develop emergency plans and protocols for communicating with families in the event of an outbreak or pandemic. Districts should also consider how best to support teaching and learning if students are under self-quarantine or a school is closed.

The [U.S. Department of Education recommends a number of options](#) to ensure students can continue learning while at home, including online resources, video conferencing and hard-copy packets that don't require an internet connection.

Will districts lose funding because of excessive student absences?

LEAs — again, this means districts or other oversight agencies — that dismiss all students or have a material decrease in attendance due to pandemics are eligible to seek emergency relief through the California Department of Education's J-13A waiver process. For more information, visit the state Department of Education's [School Closure Considerations webpage](#).

Will the state credit districts for lost instructional days or time if they close a school?

In addition to providing ADA relief through the J-13A waiver process, California law also authorizes the state superintendent to provide credit for instructional time if there's a schoolwide closure based on a declaration of an epidemic made by a local public health officer. It's worth noting, however, that closing a school simply as a precaution without a recommendation by the local public health officer may result in the district not qualifying for a J-13A waiver — and facing penalty for failure to offer the statutorily required instructional days or minutes.

In the event of an outbreak, schools and districts are also strongly urged to consider the effects of significant absences on student achievement and establish plans to maintain a continuity of learning. (See the section above about distance learning.) Those efforts will be independent of the J-13A waiver process, which is necessary to receive credit for lost instructional time.

Can students still receive free and reduced meals if a school is closed?

The California Department of Education has received a special waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that will enable some school districts to provide meals to students during a coronavirus-related closure.

The waiver applies to districts that had previously been approved to operate the Summer Food Service Program or Seamless Summer Option, which are federally funded programs that serve free meals to children 18 and younger when school is not in session. They assist communities in which 50 percent or more of the students qualify for free and reduced-priced meals.

The waiver allows meals to be served at school and non-school sites so students can be fed without increasing the risk of spreading germs.