

FAQs on School Reopening

With schools continuing to receive new metrics, guidelines and mandates from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the State of California, we understand parents, students, community members, and school employees may have questions about when and how schools can reopen, under what circumstances, and what might cause schools to close again.

Each of the 24 districts and eight charter schools in Monterey County is responsible for developing and implementing its own reopening plan. Each school's situation is different, and we know that reopening campuses will require a lot of planning and preparation to keep students, families, and staff members safe.

Read on for answers to frequently asked questions about school reopening in Monterey County.

What are the state requirements for allowing schools to reopen for in-person instruction?

Under a system announced August 28, 2020, every county in California is assigned to a tier based on its rate of new cases and positivity percentage. The new system contains four tiers: purple (widespread risk level), red (substantial risk level), orange (moderate risk level), and yellow (minimal risk level).

Schools in the purple tier are not permitted to reopen for modified in-person instruction, unless they receive a waiver from their local health department for TK-6 grades. Schools can reopen for in-person instruction once their county has been in the red tier for at least two weeks.

However, schools in the purple tier can conduct targeted, specialist support and services with small cohorts of students. Schools are permitted to offer modified in-person instruction and services to small cohorts of students (14 students to 2 adults or a configuration of no more than 16 individuals total in the cohort) with special needs (students with disabilities, English learners, homeless youth, foster youth, those struggling with distance learning, etc.).

What tier is Monterey County in? When will school campuses be allowed to reopen for in-person instruction?

Monterey County is in the purple tier. To move forward, a county must meet the next tier's criteria for two consecutive weeks. Schools can reopen for modified in-person instruction once their county has been in the red tier for at least two weeks.

Will all Monterey County school campuses reopen for in-person instruction two weeks after we enter the red tier?

Not necessarily. Each district and charter school is responsible for developing and implementing its own reopening plan. Some schools may be ready for modified in-person learning. Other schools have plans for a hybrid model or only distance learning for the semester. For more information on your district/school's reopening plans, please visit the district/school website.

Will schools have to close if the county moves back into the purple tier?

According to CDPH, schools should begin testing staff, or increase frequency of staff testing, but are not required to close. See Q&A below (What would make schools close, once reopened?) for the metrics guiding a school closure.

What would make schools close, once reopened?

According to CDPH, school closure may be appropriate when there are multiple cases in multiple cohorts at a school or when at least 5% of the total number of teachers/student/staff are cases within a 14-day period, depending on the size and physical layout of the school.

The local public health officer may also determine school closure is warranted for other reasons, including results from public health investigation or other local epidemiological data.

When would a school be allowed to reopen, after closure due to COVID-19 cases?

Schools would typically reopen after 14 days and the following have occurred:

- Cleaning and disinfection
- Public health investigation
- Consultation with the local public health department

What would make a district close? When could it reopen?

A superintendent should close a school district if 25% or more of schools in a district have closed due to COVID-19 within 14 days, and in consultation with the local public health department. Districts may typically reopen after 14 days, in consultation with local public health.

When campuses reopen, do students need to be tested for COVID-19?

There is no general testing requirement for students. CDPH recommends daily visual wellness and symptoms checks prior to individuals entering a school campus.

When campuses reopen, do staff members need to be tested?

The CDPH guidance recommends school districts and schools ensure that staff are tested periodically by their primary care provider or by referring teachers to a community testing site, as testing capacity permits and as practicable. Examples of recommended frequency include all staff being tested over two months, where 25% of staff are tested every two weeks, or 50% every month to rotate which staff members are tested over time.

What is public health's role in reopening schools?

Local public health determines the timing and conditions for school to reopen based on guidance from the state on what health protective measures need to be implemented. Guidance from CDPH is guidance only, not requirements for reopening. The Monterey County Health Department has not given any specific requirements to schools in Monterey County; we have been instructed to rely upon CDPH guidance only.

What is the role of the Monterey County Office of Education (MCOE) in reopening schools?

MCOE is here to support districts and charter schools in following state and local guidelines. It does not order closures or reopening of schools.

MCOE has created materials to support districts and schools in reopening. The planning materials align with guidance from the state and federal governments.

Will physical distancing be required when campuses reopen?

Guidance from CDPH is that distancing is required for employees and is to be implemented "as practicable" for students. That allows school leaders flexibility when maintaining six feet of space between students may not be possible.

Will face coverings be required when campuses reopen?

Yes. CDPH guidance for schools requires all children in 3rd grade or older to wear facial coverings.

Will students, staff, and visitors be screened for symptoms before coming on campus?

Yes. CDPH requires daily screening for students, staff, and visitors prior to entry into school facilities.

Have additional questions about reopening schools or school guidance in California? Please contact MCOE Communications and Public Relations Officer, Jessica Hull at jhull@montereycoe.org or 831-784-4245.