

Opening schools

As school districts begin to wrestle with plans for school in the fall, we at Panorama Pediatric Group would like to call attention to the position statement released by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It states that school districts should strive to re-open with in-person instruction this fall. We agree with this statement, and hope that the local school districts here in Monroe County will follow suit. Though data about COVID-19 is constantly in flux, there are several facts regarding coronavirus and children that seem to hold true so far:

- Children do get coronavirus but most get mildly ill, and deaths are rare. Thus far there have been 63 pediatric deaths related to COVID-19 in the US. There were 175 pediatric deaths due to influenza in the 2019-2020 flu season
- Children have a much lower contagiousness than adults; spread in families and schools seems to almost always be adult to child rather than child to adult
- Schools have opened in several countries in Europe (with appropriate precautions) without an increase in cases
- Online instruction was inferior to in-person instruction, especially for special needs children, and led to significant stress for children and their parents

This data supports the concept that schools can open safely in the fall if using appropriate precautions. The AAP statement rightly states that "COVID-19 policies are intended to mitigate, not eliminate, risk. No single action or set of actions will completely eliminate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission." Masks, social distancing, cohorting of students, schedule and busing changes, and other strategies can and should be utilized. Districts should be supplied with the funding and resources necessary to execute those strategies. Local, state, and federal governments should play a role in that funding where necessary. Schools should then stay open even if COVID-19 begins to circulate more widely, if data shows the schools are not acting as a driving force in the outbreak. We should avoid the mindset of "the safest thing is for schools to stay closed." The best decision for children is for schools to open.