



County of Malheur

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

MCHD Will Work with School Districts to Return Students to the Classroom

The Malheur County Health Department (MCHD) commends the Governor's announcement yesterday to put more Oregon schools on track to return to in-person instruction, beginning as early as January 2021. Read the press release [here](#). Local public health will continue working closely with school districts to follow their Ready Schools, Safe Learners [Blueprints](#) and allow more students back into the classroom in person, full time.

"As public health workers, we are very aware of the hardships that students, teachers, and parents have endured while schools are closed to regular in-person instruction and we support the efforts to return students to the classroom, where we know they thrive best," said Sarah Poe, MCHD Director.

As a community with a nearly 30% childhood poverty rate, our schools are critical supports to the many needs families have not just for learning, but addressing many of their [social determinants of health](#). Rural, high-poverty counties are disproportionately affected by the hardships of both COVID-19 and remote learning. For many months of this pandemic, the counties with the highest incident rate of COVID-19 cases were also counties with a high number of people of color, essential jobs in high-risk industries that cannot be done remotely, a lack of childcare providers, and less community social supports to narrow the gap in capacity to effectively and safely provide distance learning. All of these risk factors negatively affect social determinants of health and have resulted in not only a disproportionate impact of severe COVID-19, but also more students at home without safe and equitable support to sustain distance learning.

COVID-19 vaccines will be available to essential workers, including school teachers and staff, soon after the priority group of healthcare workers has had access to the vaccine. We hope to have more information on county vaccine distribution plans soon.

Thank you to the many advocates who worked on state and local levels to meet the needs of students, teachers, school staff, and families during this crisis. Thank you to Governor Brown for her decision to support a more local response.

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