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Missouri Pediatricians Offer Assistance on School Reopening

The Missouri Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MOAAP) is composed of over 1,100 Missouri pediatric providers who are committed to promoting the health of all of Missouri's children. We strongly support collaborative decision making among Missouri school districts, local and state health departments, and general and subspecialty pediatricians to develop a plan for Missouri children to safely return to school during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools are integral to the health, development, and general well-being of children. In addition to traditional education, schools are often an essential provider of food, shelter, and a safe space for Missouri children to grow and develop. Importantly, Missouri schools provide the social, mental, and emotional opportunities for our children to learn the skills necessary to become productive members of the workforce and our future leaders.

Increasing data has found COVID-19 to be a generally mild illness in children and transmission from child to child or adults to be uncommon, with even asymptomatic transmission rare. In contrast, rates of child food insecurity and hospitalizations from severe injuries have increased during the time of COVID-19-related school closures. Further, we are concerned about children falling behind in educational development due to temporary school closures and the transition to virtual learning.

We understand the process of re-opening schools is a daunting task. However, as Missouri pediatricians, we stand with our partners in the education sector, our state and local health departments, our local school districts, and parents across Missouri as advocates for child health. We are willing to provide guidance based on our expertise in health, infectious disease, and child development to all of our partners and hope to work collaboratively to develop flexible and developmentally-appropriate guidelines which minimize the risk of novel coronavirus transmission while providing the best learning environment possible.