

July 27, 2020

I want to share two important figures: **669** and **204**. Before I explain why those are important, I'll explain why I'm writing this message to our community.

Stanislaus County children need to be in school. We all want this; the teachers, the school administrators, the community, all of us want children to learn in a classroom. The distance learning alternative and the lack of important school-based programs and activities means a painful loss to our community. We are also aware of the stress working families have when the children are not in school during the day. So why can't we open the schools now and if we can't, what will it take to get us there?

First, I want to review a few hard facts:

1. **We are currently surging with COVID-19 infections.** We had the highest rate of infection based on our population and the highest testing positivity rate of any county in the state last week.
2. **Children do get infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.** Children younger than 10 years old seem to get infected less than adults. But there isn't a cut off where suddenly children start becoming infected with this virus at the same rate as adults. This is a gradual increase with age. So, our high school students are more likely to become infected than our elementary school students. Since the beginning of the pandemic **669** Stanislaus County school-aged children (5-18 years) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, **204** in the past 9 days. Imagine how many exposures would have occurred in our schools if they were currently open. How many children would have been sent home for a 14-day quarantine? How many school staff?
3. **Children do spread COVID-19.** Again, younger children don't seem to spread COVID-19 as much as adults, but they do spread this virus. While data are still lacking, it does appear that the older a child is, the more they spread like an adult. School aged children don't interact only with other children. They interact with many adult staff at school. They go home where adults of all ages live and spread COVID-19. These adults are at increased risk for severe disease.
4. **Children do get severe disease.** Stanislaus County school-aged children have been hospitalized. As with adults, the risk for severe disease increases with age. While less likely than adults, children do get severe disease and children do die from COVID-19.

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Our goal is to get Stanislaus County children back into the classroom. How can we do this? It is going to take effort by all of us. There is no magic pill, no quick fix. We need to decrease the spread of COVID-19 in our county. We can do this!

How?

1. **We must keep a physical distance of at least six (6) feet from all non-household members at all times.** This includes 6-foot distance from coworkers, other family members, friends, everyone who doesn't live in the house with us.
2. **We must all cover our noses and mouths at all times when in public,** most importantly when inside, even around our family who don't live in the same household.
3. **We must wash our hands thoroughly and often.** We must act and interact with people very differently than before this pandemic. It isn't fun. It isn't comfortable. We don't like it. It takes constant effort. This is fatiguing and we're all tired of it, and we can do this.

It's what we must do to lower our community transmission enough to get our children back in school. To open businesses again. To feel life coming back to normal just a little more.

We will get through these difficult times. Our children will be back in the classroom learning. The pandemic will end. We cannot stop this virus, but we can slow the spread. This is achievable if we all follow these three actions every day. Please help remind and support one another so our children can go back to school and our businesses can open. We can and must do this together.

Sincerely,

Julie Vaishampayan, MD, MPH, FIDSA