



What You Should Know **COVID-19**

Missouri Novel Coronavirus Information Hotline  877-435-8411

Dear State of Missouri Team,

As an educator, I always love seeing the back-to-school aisles at the store each summer. Come late July and early August there is a buzz in the air, with new beginnings just around the corner. I'm sure many of you can relate – as parents, grandparents, or former students yourselves. But this summer is different. The start of the upcoming school year is sure to bring with it a whole new set of feelings. The COVID-19 pandemic will certainly change the way schools do business.

Over the last month, our team at the **Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** (DESE) has been focused on how we can safely reopen Missouri public schools. Closing school buildings was necessary in March. But, there are serious educational and social consequences that can come from our students not attending school in person. These consequences are being considered along with the continued risk of COVID-19.

I was honored to join Governor Parson last week in Washington D.C. to represent Missouri at the White House Summit on Safely Reopening America's Schools. We sat down with other leaders from education, health and government, as well as parents and students from across the country. Here in Missouri, we work hard as a state workforce to serve our citizens. DESE has worked with a number of other state agency colleagues as we work and aim to serve Missourians in this important way. For example:

- It's challenging for school leaders to think about how to appropriately screen students and staff for COVID-19, how to do physical distancing and how to implement face covering protocols. DESE is working with the **Department of Health and Senior Services** (DHSS) and Missouri pediatric infectious disease doctors to answer health-related questions. We published this [FAQ document](#) with DHSS and will continue to add more information.
- DESE is working with the **Department of Economic Development** (DED) to address the student connectivity issue. DED and DESE are working together to reimburse schools that work to expand WiFi networks outside of school buildings. They will provide more devices to students so they're better able to transition to distance learning in the future. You can read more about [how we are addressing these challenges here](#).
- During the pandemic, child abuse and neglect hotline calls have been down. The **Department of Social Services** (DSS) has reported as much as a 50 percent drop in the number of child abuse and neglect calls they're receiving. We know our educators and school staff members make many of those difficult calls to protect the students they care for during the school day. We are working to address the social-emotional toll this pandemic may have taken on some of our students. This is just one serious consequence of students not being at school. Please take time to [review the resources we've shared in our "Mental Health/Counselor Information" section here](#) on our COVID-19 webpage.

We know school reopening decisions impact many of you – whether you’re a parent or grandparent, or have a family member or friend who works in a school. There are still many uncertainties, and the next several weeks will continue to inform the school reopening decisions as we learn more about the virus and its prevalence in our communities. But there is one thing we do know:

We will get through this together. Our students are counting on us.

Best,

Margie Vandeven

Commissioner of Education

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

This email was sent using GovDelivery Communications Cloud on behalf of: Office of Governor Michael L. Parson · PO Box 720 · Jefferson City, MO 65102 · (573) 751-3222

