



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

ELIZABETH A. CHAR, M.D.
DIRECTOR

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Hawai'i Department of Health releases updated COVID-19 guidance for schools

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health released updated guidance to elementary, middle and high schools today to help school administrators make decisions to safely transition between different models of learning — virtual classes, traditional classroom learning, or a combination of at-home learning and in-person learning. The guidance is available on the Department of Health's website at: <https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/school-guidance/>

“The core considerations for schools, the measures schools must take to prevent spread of disease, have not changed and remain the most important part of any school's preparations to open for in-person learning and their response to COVID-19,” said Dr. Sarah Kemble, acting state epidemiologist. “Our guidance on what learning model area complexes should adopt is still based on disease transmission rates and the ability of schools to respond to COVID-19.”

Updated reopening thresholds for schools now align with reopening plans for Honolulu and Kaua'i that were approved by Gov. David Ige and apply recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a way that fits our experience with COVID-19 in Hawai'i.

The new reopening thresholds are based on two consecutive seven-day averages of daily new case rates and testing percent positivity by island, a shift from the prior thresholds which were based on a single cumulative 14-day average. By using the seven-day daily average per 100,000 population, the measures can be compared more easily with trend charts of case rates by county and island that are updated daily on our website and can be tracked alongside weekly county reopening measures.

“The ability to track the measures in real-time allows schools to look ahead and plan more actively for learning model changes, but the idea is to base an actual change in learning model on at least two weeks of data,” Kemble said. The percent of tests that are positive by county has been added as a secondary measure.

The learning model thresholds derived from the preceding two 7-day cycles are posted on the Department of Health's website at <https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/school-guidance/> each Wednesday at noon.

The website also includes new information and upgrades:

- Cases in the past 14 days;
- Cases per 100,000 population in the past 14 days;
- Tests per 100,000 population in the past 14 days;
- Test percent positivity in the past 14 days;
- For all maps, cases based on date of report instead of date of symptom onset or specimen collection, as previously reported;
- Option to view daily case counts trend line curve by island in addition to by county; and
- Option to view case rate curves by island in addition to county.

As a result of the new guidance, the following data is no longer posted on the website:

- Cases in the past 28 days
- Cases per 10,000 population in the past 28 days
- Total cases
- Total cases per 10,000 population
- Tests per 10,000 population in the past 28 days

Last month, the Hawai'i Department of Health issued a comprehensive, 28-page guidance document for public and charter schools to ensure the education of youth statewide during the pandemic continues with the least disruption possible and without putting students, teachers and staff at increased risk for COVID-19.

The health department's updated guidance issued today was a collaborative effort that included input from the Hawai'i Department of Education, Hawai'i Association of Independent Schools, Hawai'i Catholic Schools, Hawai'i Public Charter Schools Commission, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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