



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION**

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Dear County and District Superintendents, Charter School Administrators, and Principals:

Wildfire Smoke Guidance for California Schools

The 2019 wildfire season is upon us; it is evidence of the new normal facing our state. Whether at home, at school, or at work, we cannot stress enough that the time to prepare is now.

To help schools and local educational agencies prepare to address impacts from wildfire smoke that can be felt hundreds of miles from the source, the California Department of Education (CDE) partnered with the California Air Resources Board, California Air Pollution Control Officers Association, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, Association of California School Administrators, and California School Boards Association to develop guidance that local education leaders can use in conversation with local air districts to determine how school activities will be affected when air quality is poor. This guidance can be found on the CDE web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ep/airquality.asp>.

The possibility of closing school due to smoke is a complex local decision. I invite you to use this new guidance as a tool to inform your planning efforts, including how you will communicate air quality issues to the families you serve.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please contact Jeffrey Reyes, Education Administrator, Emergency Coordination and Grant Management, by phone at 916-319-0327 or by email at EmergencyServices@cde.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Tony Thurmond

TT:lt
2019-04449



Memo: Get Smart about Wildfire Smoke - Clear Guidelines for Schools and Wildfire Smoke

Over the last decade, devastating wildfires have ravaged communities and school districts in every corner of this state.

These massive disasters impacted tens of thousands of Californians in the communities they call home and blanketed entire regions of California with thick, unhealthy smoke.

When a wildfire occurs nearby, the decision to close or evacuate a school is straightforward. However, as we have seen over the past several years, wildfire smoke can settle in communities hundreds of miles from the location of the fire and impact the health of students and school district operations.

Without clear state guidelines, districts have been forced to make difficult, last minute decisions on whether to cancel classes, remain open, or modify school events.

This is why leaders from the education, air quality, and public health communities established a working group to develop state guidance regarding air quality for California's 1,026 school districts during wildfire smoke days.

The guidelines attached to this message are intended to advance local conversations between school districts, public health officers, air districts, and the community, and provide educational leaders with the data they need to make informed decisions when their communities are inundated with wildfire smoke.

The guidelines are not meant to supersede any protocols or guidelines school districts may have already adopted.

We encourage districts that haven't already addressed this issue to begin the conversation now, prior to the start of the 2019-20 school year. California's next big wildfire is not a matter of if, but when.

For questions on how to track air quality in your community, please contact your local air district. To find which air district serves your community, visit <https://www.arb.ca.gov/app/dislookup/dislookup.php>.

Thank you for your partnership on this critical issue.

SCHOOL AIR QUALITY ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS

PROTECT STUDENT HEALTH DURING POOR AIR QUALITY

Air quality is an important consideration for schools in terms of student activities. Local air districts are available to assist schools with understanding local air quality concerns and actions they can take to protect student health. To find out more, contact your local air district. Visit this page to learn which District serves your area:

www.arb.ca.gov/app/dislookup/dislookup.php

The following school activity recommendations are based on consultation with health researchers and several important principles drawn from recent studies.

Modify these levels to correspond with the AQI, emissions concentration, or other air district recommended method for your region.

Air Quality Level

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Recess (15min)	No restrictions	Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Sensitive individuals should exercise indoors or avoid vigorous outdoor activities.*	Exercise indoors or avoid vigorous outdoor activities. Sensitive individuals should remain indoors.*	No outdoor activity. All activities should be moved indoors.
P.E. (1hr)	No restrictions	Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Sensitive individuals should exercise indoors or avoid vigorous outdoor activities.*	Exercise indoors or limit vigorous outdoor activities to a maximum of 15 minutes Sensitive individuals should remain indoors.*	No outdoor activity. All activities should be moved indoors.
Athletic Practice & Training (2-4hours)	No restrictions	Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Reduce vigorous exercise to 30 minutes per hour of practice time with increased rest breaks and substitutions. Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Exercise indoors or reduce vigorous exercise to 30 minutes of practice time with increased rest breaks and substitutions. Sensitive individuals should remain indoors.*	No outdoor activity. All activities should be moved indoors.
Scheduled Sporting Events	No restrictions	Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Increase rest breaks and substitutions per CIF guidelines for extreme heat.** Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Increase rest breaks and substitutions per CIF guidelines for extreme heat.** Ensure that sensitive individuals are medically managing their condition.*	Event must be rescheduled or relocated.

* Sensitive individuals include all those with asthma or other heart/lung conditions

*** To meet the conditions for approval of a waiver due to emergency conditions (Form J-13A) from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction poor air quality must be shown to be caused by an emergency event such as a wildfire.

** California Interscholastic Federation

Air Quality Guidance Template for Schools

About the Guidelines:

- These guidelines are based on the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and Centers for Disease Control's [Air Quality and Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools](#) and [Wildfire Smoke: A Guide for Public Health Officials](#). The guidelines are designed to assist in your decision-making process.
- Modify the template and chart as needed after consultation with your local county office of education, local school districts, local air district, and local public health experts to determine which air quality monitoring methodology, such as Air Quality Index, total emissions concentration, or other air district-recommended method best applies in your school district.
- This template and chart are not intended to supersede existing guidelines and policies developed by local authorities, including the school districts or air districts.
- These guidelines are intended to assist school districts in making decisions when air quality is poor. *School closure and event cancellation is ultimately a school district-by-school district decision based on local conditions.*
- The impact of smoke depends on the sensitivity of the person and the length of exposure, as outlined in the sample chart below. Children with respiratory or heart conditions are vulnerable to poor air quality and may require extra precautions. School districts should advise parents to consult with their family health care provider.

Using the Guidelines:

- School districts will need to monitor local air quality conditions using air quality tracking tools recommended by their local air district. One example of such a tool is U.S. EPA's air quality index (AQI) available at [AirNow.gov](#). However, because other air quality tracking methodologies may be used in your jurisdiction, it is highly recommended to contact your local air district for advice on the most appropriate tools to use for your region.
- School districts should make decisions about school activities and closures based on air quality measurements and local conditions, such as the availability and quality of school building air filtration and direct observation of onsite indoor/outdoor air quality.
- School districts may wish to consult with their local air district regarding outdoor air and their local public health official regarding indoor air before making a final determination.
- School districts should report any school closures to their County Office of Education for media notification as well as announce closures to families using normal school closure procedures.

Additional Air Quality Information & Resources

About AirNow.gov:

- A network of monitors maintained and operated by trained government agencies.
- It is recommended by many air districts, the California Air Resources Board, and U.S. EPA.
- AirNow monitors form a network to track regional air quality. Pollutants like smoke tend to be well-mixed in the atmosphere and may be adequately represented by these monitors, even if a monitor is not in the same neighborhood as a school.
- Uses highly accurate tools that are regularly monitored for quality control by U.S. EPA. Tools remain accurate at all levels as opposed to personal sensors like Purple Air, which overestimate (especially at AQI of 150 or higher)
- Although AirNow is relied on by many jurisdictions, please consult with your local air district about resources school districts can use that will best represent local air quality.

About Masks:

- When air is unhealthy, the best option is to reduce physical activity and stay indoors with windows/doors closed. If indoor temperature is high, get to a location with clean filtered air such as a public library, shopping mall or other building with heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system filtration.
- Masks have limitations. Surgical gauze masks provide no protection from smoke. N95 respirator masks are designed for professional use by trained adults and are not intended for children. Therefore, masks are not recommended for children by air quality districts/public health agencies.
- N95 masks require a perfect seal to be effective. If these masks are not fitted correctly, they will provide little if any protection.
- Masks can exacerbate breathing difficulty for sensitive breathers or potentially cause deeper breathing, which draws particulates deeper into the lungs if they are not fitted correctly.
- Masks must be kept clean and replaced frequently to be effective. If a mask is used, please refer to the mask manufacturer's recommendations on cleaning and replacement intervals.

Recommendations for Ensuring Cleaner Air at School:

- Install and maintain HVAC air conditioning system with medium or high-efficiency filtration. Install high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters if possible. See below for U.S. EPA recommendations for air filtration.
https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/smoke_fires/indoor-air-filtration-factsheet-508.pdf
- Install portable HEPA filters in classrooms where possible.

- Approved filters: <https://www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/aircleaners/certified.htm>
- Be sure that portable filters are sized correctly for the room.
- Ensure doors and windows are sealed tightly. Minimize air movement in and out of room.

Considerations for School Districts from CDE: Before You Make a Decision to Close a School

Outdoor air quality is one factor local educational agencies (LEAs) need to consider when making a school closure decision. LEAs should consider the factors below, in addition to any other relevant local conditions or concerns, when deciding to close school.

Health and Safety:

- **Indoor air quality.** Ventilation and filtration systems at schools may offer a higher level of protection than residential systems.
- **Supervision.** The school environment provides appropriate student supervision by trained and caring adults who can ensure students remain indoors.
- **Student support services.** School may be the primary place where students receive needed health and counseling services.
- **Nutrition services.** Schools serve healthy meals to a significant proportion of students. If school is closed, it is a substantial challenge at best for LEAs to feed students.

Using an Equity Lens:

- Socioeconomically disadvantaged families may not have options for alternate child care.
- Working parents and guardians are disproportionately affected by school closure and could suffer significant professional or economic consequences as a result.
- Students receiving free or reduced-price meals may not have a reliable alternate source of healthy food.
- Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may not have access to needed services during school closure.
- Schools provide safe and supportive environments for their students; our most vulnerable students rely on them most.

Instructional Time:

- Instructional time is foundational to students' academic achievement. LEAs should consider adding instructional days or minutes to the school calendar when time is lost due to school closure.

- LEAs that have a foreseeable loss of instructional time due to a history of school closures should consider adding “built-in emergency” days to the annual school calendar.
- Information on requesting credit for lost attendance and instructional time during an emergency is available on the California Department of Education’s website at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/pa/i13a.asp>.

National School Lunch Program Meal Reimbursement:

- *Education Code* Section 49505 allows for LEAs to submit an application for meal reimbursement during a disaster.
- The disaster would require a state or federal declaration for the county affected by the disaster.
- The application is available on the California Department of Education’s website at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/documents/disastermealapp.doc>.

Guidance for Families When Schools are Closed:

- Stay indoors.
- Keep doors and windows closed.
- Consult a Physician if you have concerns about your child’s health.

**SECTION 3000
BUSINESS AND NONINSTRUCTIONAL OPERATIONS**

**BOARD POLICY
BP 3516.5**

**Emergency Schedules
BP 3516.5**

In order to provide for the safety of students and staff, the Governing Board authorizes the Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) to close a school site, change the regular school day schedule, or take any necessary action when hazardous environmental, dangerous weather conditions or other emergencies or exigent circumstances of such magnitude to warrant the closing of school.

(cf. 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan)
(cf. 4157/4257/4357 - Employee Safety)
(cf. 5142 - Safety)
(cf. 6112 - School Day)

When an emergency condition causes a school closure for three days, the Superintendent shall call an emergency special board meeting to discuss the magnitude of the emergency to determine the extension of the school closure beyond the third day and its impact on the instructional program of the school/district.

When an emergency condition causes a school closure, reduction in attendance, or change in schedule pursuant to Education Code 41422 or 46392, thereby preventing the district from complying with the minimum number of instructional days or minutes required by law, the Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) shall complete and submit to the Superintendent of Public Instruction the necessary forms for obtaining approval of the days of the closure, reduction in attendance, or change in schedule. The Superintendent or designee shall submit other relevant district records as may be required.

(cf. 3580 - District Records)
(cf. 6111 - School Calendar)

The Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) shall utilize the California Department of Education *Wildfire Smoke Guidance for California Schools* and *School Air Quality Activity Recommendations* in conjunction with the published Ventura County Air Quality Control District (VCAQCD) Air Quality Index (AQI) when determining the need to close schools. For information regarding Excessive Heat closures, or 'Heat Days', please refer to the attached *Memorandum of Understanding*.

WEB SITE

California Department of Education: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ep/airquality.asp>

***Note: Vehicle Code 34501.6 mandates the Governing Board of any district that provides student transportation to adopt procedures that limit the home-to-school operation of school buses when atmospheric conditions reduce visibility to 200 feet or less; see AR 3543

Transportation Safety and Emergencies for language implementing this mandate. The following optional paragraph may be revised to reflect district practice. ***

The Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) shall establish a system for informing students and parents/guardians when school buses are not operating as scheduled, the school day schedule is changed, or the school is closed. The district's notification system shall include, but is not limited to, notifying local television and radio stations, posting on district web site(s), sending email and text messages, and/or making telephone calls.

(cf. 1112 - Media Relations)
(cf. 1113 - District and School Web Sites)
(cf. 3542 - School Bus Drivers)
(cf. 3543 - Transportation Safety and Emergencies)

Whenever the school day schedule changes after students have arrived at school, the Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) shall ensure that students are supervised in accordance with the procedures specified in the district's emergency and disaster preparedness plan.

(cf. 3516 - Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness Plan)

The Superintendent or designee (other district or site administrator) may provide a means to make up lost instructional time later during the year. Such planning for the make-up of lost instructional time later during the year shall include community stakeholders and union partners. Students and parents/guardians shall receive timely advanced notice (by 6:00 p.m. the previous evening if possible) of any resulting changes in the school calendar or school day schedule.

This policy will be reviewed and updated every 2 years.

Legal Reference:

EDUCATION CODE

41420 Required length of school term
41422 Schools not maintained for 175 days
46010 Total days of attendance
46100-46192 Attendance; maximum credit; minimum day
46390 Calculation of ADA in emergency
46391 Lost or destroyed ADA records
46392 Decreased attendance in emergency situation

VEHICLE CODE

34501.6 School buses; reduced visibility

Management Resources:

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CORRESPONDENCE

90-01 Average Daily Attendance Credit During Periods of Emergency, February 10, 2005

WEB SITES

California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov> (12/92 11/99) 7/10 8/19