

Hello,

I teach high school Biology in Seaside, Oregon.

I am urging you to keep school buildings closed and protect lives with stringent safety measures as criteria for reopening schools.

Because most Oregon schools started remote at the beginning of the school year this year, Oregon educators and students have had a much more stable and consistent experience during this pandemic year than their counterparts around the country have. Friends and colleagues from around the country report how disruptive it is for schools to reopen, only to close two weeks later following exposures and outbreaks at school.

Parents around Oregon have reported that their family pediatricians are not testing children for COVID, either with or without symptoms, so those children are not being counted in our OHA statistics, and are not being reported to schools or by schools. Educators where schools are open in Oregon have reported that their administrators have not been transparent with them about exposures and outbreaks within their schools.

Colt Gill has repeatedly said, "There is no transmission in schools," but I have zero faith in that statement owing to people I know whose children have not been able to get a COVID test, and my colleagues at other schools who say that their administrators have not been honest with them.

We are seeing numbers of hospitalized children skyrocket around the country where schools are open. Teachers and school staff are dying, as well.

I understand that students' mental health is suffering. I think protecting their physical health is also paramount. Long COVID could saddle children with a lifetime of permanent disability owing to damage to their heart, lungs and brain as researchers are finding even in children who present as asymptomatic.

Please keep us safe. As a biology teacher with considerable background in studying outbreaks and epidemics and the CDC's response to them over the past two decades, we need leadership and policy to keep us safe, not just depending that individuals will do the right thing. 420,000 dead Americans shows us that we need more than advisory guidelines.

Thank you,
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