



COVID-19 Benchmarks for Schools are Updated

AZDHS updates school benchmarks

Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS) updated its list of health benchmarks schools may use to determine whether it's safe to resume either partial or full in-person instruction.

In August, AZDHS released the Benchmarks for Safely Returning to In-Person Instruction plan, which has three metrics: the number of cases, the percentage of people testing positive and the percentage of hospital visits for COVID-like illnesses. Schools may open if there is minimal to moderate virus spread in the community but should take extensive precautions, such as keeping some students at home, requiring masks and creating physical distancing. The AZDHS revision covers when open schools may choose to move back into remote learning. The previous recommendation was that schools move into remote learning when one or more metrics rise to substantial levels. The updated guidance states that if a school is in a county where all three benchmarks show substantial spread for two weeks, it should prepare for remote learning. If one benchmark shows substantial spread for two weeks, the recommendation is to consult with local health officials about a move to remote learning.

AZDHS Director Christ and Governor Ducey have been working with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) on the benchmark changes. Christ stated "during these conversations our partners expressed concerns about the instability that would occur if recommendations to move back to virtual learning were based on a change in a single benchmark, especially in smaller rural counties." However, Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman responded that ADE did not request or recommend any changes to the AZDHS school benchmarks.

Schools are required to report any COVID-19 outbreaks to students, their

parents, staff and their county health department. School districts are not required to inform the general public as to which schools are experiencing outbreaks.

The school benchmarks are optional. Governor Ducey has left it up to individual districts and schools to decide when to reopen safely, and when to shift to remote learning.

A dashboard available [here](#), indicates whether counties meet the recommended benchmarks for initial reopening of in-person learning in schools.

To review Benchmarks for Safely Returning to In-Person Instruction, click [here](#).

To review School Benchmarks by County, click [here](#).

AZDHS issues COVID-19 update

Arizona Department of Health Services (AZDHS) officials reported 1,565 additional new daily COVID-19 cases, the fifth time in a week where more than 1,000 cases were reported. Before last week, that level had been reached only two times in the prior five weeks. In response to this surge, Governor Ducey stated that “we’ve been through this before and we’ve learned what works to combat this virus.” He continued, “we’ve had time to prepare. I’m confident that we can continue to protect public health and keep our economy moving during this time.”

AZDHS figures show that 86% of inpatient beds and 86% of ICU beds were in use, which includes people being treated for COVID-19 and other patients. COVID-19 patients were using 10% of all inpatient beds and 11% of ICU beds. Overall, 29% of ventilators were in use. The state’s COVID-19 rate of spread (Rt) is above 1 at 1.12 (the average number of people a COVID-positive individual will infect). Of known test results from last week, AZDHS reported that 6% have come back positive. A positivity rate of 5% or less is considered a good indicator that the spread is being controlled.

For more information on free COVID-19 testing sites click [here](#).

Arizona Corporation Commission approves new rules

On a split vote (3-2), the Arizona Corporation Commission approved a plan for electric utilities to obtain all of their energy from carbon-free sources by 2050.

The new regulations will require electric utilities to get half of their power from renewable energy like solar and wind by 2035. By 2050, utilities would need to supply all customer demand for electricity with either renewables,

carbon-free nuclear, or energy-efficiency measures such as subsidizing low-watt lightbulbs or attic insulation for customers. Among the new changes is a requirement for electric utilities to phase out coal and natural gas burning power plants. Carbon reductions are to be based on the amount of carbon a utility's power plants emitted on average in the years 2016-18. Also included are new requirements for power storage. By 2036, utilities must have energy storage, probably large batteries, equal to 5% of the utility's 2020 peak demand, and a portion of that storage must be owned by customers. Flexibility is offered for utility companies, who can seek waivers on a case-by-case basis and are specifically allowed to acquire power that doesn't conform to the clean-energy goals if required to meet reliability needs or handle emergencies.

The Commission's changes update the Renewable Energy Standard and Tariff that was passed in 2006. Once finalized, the plan will closer align Arizona with other western states, who have all transitioned to renewable or carbon-free energy targets.

Arizona election update

More than 2 million people have already voted statewide, and in Maricopa County election officials have already processed over 1.2 million ballots.

New data suggests that Democrats have already exceeded their 2016 turnout of 47.4% by 12 percentage points and Republican turnout is at 49.3%, near the same as it was in 2016. Most notably, voters aged 18 to 29 have already cast more than 137,000 ballots, compared to less than 89,000 total in the 2016 election. More than 149,000 of voters ages 30 to 39 have voted so far, surpassing total turnout for that age group in 2016 by 44%.

According to Democrat group NextGen, 42% of newly registered voters who have already cast ballots are Democrats, while just 28% are Republicans. Of those who have not voted in any of the last four general elections, 37% of those who have already voted are Democrats, while just 25% are Republicans. Of those who have voted in only one of the last four general elections, 43% of those who have already voted are Democrats, while just 28% are Republicans. Local GOP pundits have suggested that Democrats have an advantage with "4X4" voters who have voted in the past four elections; about 69% of Democratic "4X4" voters who requested a mail-in ballot have already voted, while only half of all Republicans "4X4" voters who requested a ballot have mailed it in or dropped it off.

Maricopa County election officials expect to see high Election Day (in-person) turnout of roughly 200,000 to 300,000. There are now 48 in-person early voting centers throughout Maricopa County. The sites are listed [here](#). (click for link).

For more information on how to check the status of your ballot, click [here](#).



Governor Ducey issues COVID-19 and Food Assistance Update



Arizona Update on the Issues



[Click here to find the new AGA analysis of the 2020 House races](#)

[Click here to find the new AGA analysis of the 2020 Senate races](#)

Legislators' Birthdays



Happy Birthday
Sen. Victoria Steele (D)
Thursday, November 5th

Representing LD9, Senator Steele was first elected to the House in 2012 and resigned to run for Congress in 2016. She was elected to the Senate in 2018. A native of Pennsylvania, Steele was a radio and TV anchor for 25 years.



Happy Birthday
Sen. David Bradley (D)
Friday, November 13th

Representing LD10, Senator Bradley was first elected to the House in 2002 and has served in the Senate since 2012. Elected Minority Leader for 2019-2020, Bradley is termed out and will not be seeking re-election. Born in Seattle, he

Before entering the Legislature, Steele was a certified counselor helping women with whom struggle with trauma and addiction. In addition, she created the Native Ways program at The Haven, an award-winning substance-use residential treatment program for Indigenous women. At the Legislature, Steele is a member of the Senate Government and Health and Human Services committees. Last session, her top legislative priority was SB1120 which required all school districts and charter schools to provide sex education instruction that is "medically accurate" and "age-appropriate" (both defined) for students in kindergarten through grade 12. To wish Senator Steele happy birthday: vsteele@azleg.gov

moved to Arizona in 1957 and is a United States Naval Veteran. Outside of the Legislature, Bradley serves as Chief Development Officer of *La Frontera Arizona* which provides outpatient and residential mental health and substance abuse treatment services to children, youth, and adults in Pima County. Last session, his top legislative priority was SB1596 which would have established a three-year Arizona Community Schools Pilot Program to assist public elementary and middle schools in developing "community school" plans. To wish Senator Bradley happy birthday: dbradley@azleg.gov

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