



CDC emphasis on six feet distance, infection rate may stall school reopenings, says doctor

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced guidelines on reopening schools last Friday. Dr. Jeffrey Singer of the CATO Institute joined The National Desk's Jan Jeffcoat Monday morning to discuss the CDC's roadmap to reopening.

"It's very important that we get our kids back to school. It's starting to have very serious long term consequences, particularly on children in low-income areas. So I'm glad about their latest guidelines regarding vaccinations," said Singer.

But Singer says he gives the CDC guidelines on reopening mixed reviews.

"The CDC said that it's not necessary for teachers to get vaccinated before they can go back to teaching in a classroom, and that's a good thing. Of course, we all want everybody to get vaccinated as soon as possible, but at least you don't have to wait for teachers to get vaccinated," said Singer. "Where I have some issues is there's a strong emphasis on opening schools in relation to the rate of spread in the community."

The CDC guidelines suggest that schools can opt-out of opening if they're in high community spread areas, according to Singer.

"90% of counties in America are actually in orange or red areas, which is high spread," said Singer. "Research by a team from Harvard, Boston University and Brown University found that schools could still be open even in areas of high community spread without any dire deleterious consequences, and even the CDC has found that."

The CDC guidelines also emphasize six feet social distancing, even as 172 studies across 16 countries show that three feet social distancing is adequate, says Singer.

"If three feet is adequate, six feet is better," said Singer. "I worry that this emphasis on six feet also might lead to a delay in schools opening and we could wind up having to miss another school year in many areas of this country."

The CDC guidelines fail to mention anything about ventilation in schools, a point of contention for teachers and districts looking to return to older buildings with outdated ventilation systems.

“I think they were right not to overemphasize that. We’ve known for a while that roughly over 40% or 41% of public schools are in need of upgrades in their ventilation system,” said Singer. But, “it’s expensive and time-consuming.”

Instead, Singer says there’s a quicker, cheaper solution to poor ventilation.

“What we've found is by keeping windows open, doors open, you can improve ventilation enough where it doesn't seem to be a problem.”