

The date for K-through-12 students to return to school in Arkansas has been pushed back as the state sees its second-highest daily increase in new coronavirus cases. Gov. Asa Hutchinson announced today (Thurs) an increase of 806 new cases brought the state's total to 26,052, while four new COVID-19 deaths brought the death toll to 309. The number of those hospitalized had its highest-ever increase, rising by 36 for a total of 394. Speaking in his daily briefing on the pandemic, Hutchinson said the state is ready for students to safely return to class by the end of next month.

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"...end of last school year."

Hutchinson said the state Department of Education has pushed back the start date for the upcoming school year from August 13 to between August 24 and 26. Education Secretary Johnny Key said the state has set up a three-part framework of actions school districts can take in response to the pandemic, including closing facilities and pivoting to remote instruction. However, he said there's no guidance from the state as to how to notify parents when someone tests positive at their child's school.

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"...made that known."

Key said, though it's strongly recommended, individual school districts have the power to decide whether to require students, teachers and staff to wear face masks. Today's (Thurs) increase in new cases brought the state's total number of active COVID-19 cases to 5,751. Pulaski County had 104 residents test positive, with 78 cases from Washington County and 56 from Sebastian County.