

1. Why are other Santa Barbara schools able to repopulate but Westmont can't?

When Westmont decided to start the semester virtually, the health order in effect at the time prohibited any higher education activity, including repopulating the campus and holding classes in person. Two days after we announced we'd begin the semester remotely, Santa Barbara County updated the health order to allow repopulating the campus. But the ban on classes in person and indoors will continue as long as the county remains on the [California County Watch List](#).

Westmont is monitoring the communications and plans of other schools, including UCSB and local boarding schools, and none have begun repopulating large numbers of students on their campuses. On August 17, UCSB sent an email requesting that students not return to campus but find housing that allows for appropriate physical distancing.

Westmont decided to continue postponing repopulation to allow the county case rate (cases per 100,000 residents) and positivity rate (the percentage of positive tests) to drop below the thresholds set by the state: 100 cases and 8%. If the county gets off the watch list, Westmont has the best chance of holding classes in person and indoors. The updated [County Public Health Order](#) prohibits nearly all gatherings (with only a few exemptions), so even if students returned to campus, gatherings would be severely limited.

2. Why did Westmont choose September 28 as the target date to reopen?

With our positivity rate now under the 8% threshold, the case rate is the only metric keeping the county on the [California County Watch List](#). After consulting with the Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health's education liaison, we adjusted the move-in date to September 25 to allow the case rate to continue its downward trend and give us the best chance of holding classes on campus in person and indoors. Once the county gets off of the watch list, we'll need to wait 14 days before beginning instruction in person and indoors. A start date late in September makes it more likely we'll be off the watch list or close to it at that point.

We'll also continue improving and updating our plans by observing other colleges and universities and learning what works and what doesn't. While our plans meet or exceed the vast majority of guidelines established by the California Department of Public Health, this pandemic has proven to be an incredibly fluid situation. What works today may need to be updated to be effective tomorrow.

3. Are students able to interact without restrictions once they return to campus?

When students return to campus, the restrictions will remain in place, including physical distancing, using face coverings, wiping down shared spaces (such as desks in classrooms), and other safety protocols Westmont has enacted. With COVID-19 still so active in the state, Westmont anticipates keeping safety protocols in place for the foreseeable future.

It's imperative that our community members follow all safety protocols and procedures, participate in symptom-tracking and testing, and cooperate with contact tracing should the need arise.

4. When will you know for sure that Westmont will repopulate the campus September 25-27?

Most likely, we won't know definitively about repopulating the campus by the time remote education begins August 28, but we're optimistic we'll be able to proceed as planned. The county will issue a new health order September 10, and we'll wait for that document before making an official announcement.