

National

## Elementary Schoolkids Can Stay Home Even When Schools Reop

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Elementary schoolchildren in Seoul will be allowed to study at home for up to 34 days without losing points for attendance even after schools reopen, the Seoul Met Office of Education announced Wednesday.

The exemption came amid a decision to close schools for another week after a fresh surge in coronavirus infections. It will remain effective even if the coronavirus is lowered.

The number is 20 percent of total school days. Under normal circumstances, children are allowed to skip school for certain private learning experiences for 10 percent days but cannot use them all at once.

Children in first and second grade will go back to school on May 20, while third and fourth graders will follow on May 27 and fifth and sixth graders on June 8.



Quarantine workers disinfect a school in Seoul on Monday. /Yonhap

The lockdown has reduced the number of school days to 171 for first through third graders and 173 days for fourth through sixth graders. Normally there are supposed to be 180 school days and up to 19 days set aside for private learning experiences.

With the exemption of 34 days they could now stay home until the end of the first semester if parents want. But critics say this looks like education authorities are shifting responsibility to parents by letting them decide whether to allow children to go back to school.

The education office said the decision "aims to protect children's safety and health."

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