

Role of VDH and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) in COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Efforts

Topic	Public Health Role	Role of IHEs
<p>Communication and Coordination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that IHEs have contact information for Local Health Department (LHD) staff. ● Communicate summary information on the number of cases and contacts in the jurisdiction, district, and/or region to provide situational awareness for IHEs. Ensure that anonymity of individuals is preserved and that IHEs have data necessary for adequate planning and preparations. ● Address questions and concerns of IHE faculty, staff, students, parents, caregivers, and guardians. ● Provide information about measures that can reduce the spread of disease. ● Coordinate outbreak investigations; provide specific disease prevention and control recommendations to reduce the spread of disease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish one or more COVID-19 point person(s) at each IHE to coordinate with the LHD; share contact information with the LHD. ● Maintain up-to-date contact information and implement policies that aid in contact identification (e.g., class rosters, local and permanent addresses). ● Immediately report suspected outbreaks to LHD. ● Develop culturally appropriate and accessible communication plans for students, parents and staff for when cases/outbreaks are reported. ● Electronically report outbreaks affecting staff through the VDH/Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) portal. Submit an initial report when two or more cases in staff are identified and continue to report all cases until the LHD has determined the outbreak has been closed. Report outbreaks affecting only students directly to the local health department. ● Ensure that students/faculty/staff have access to distance learning options and flexible and non-punitive absence policies. ● Create policy options to support those at higher risk for severe illness to limit their exposure risk (e.g. telework, modified job duties, virtual learning opportunities). ● Ensure students and employees have related absences excused and have access to mental health services.
<p>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Masks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make recommendations for the appropriate use of PPE and masks, also known as cloth face coverings, in IHEs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure adequate supply of PPE for clinical and other relevant staff. ● Ensure that students, faculty, and staff have access to masks to help slow the spread of disease. Encourage the use of masks, when appropriate and feasible.

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Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide culturally appropriate and accessible health education messages to reduce the spread of disease. ● Provide specific prevention and control guidance when cases and outbreaks of disease are identified. ● Promote COVIDWISE, Virginia’s exposure notification app, to employees, parents/guardians, and students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop recommendations and procedures for daily health screenings of students, faculty, and staff. ● Widely communicate prevention and control messages, including information about outbreaks, disease prevention and control recommendations, steps to take if illness develops, etc. ● Develop a plan for increased environmental cleaning and disinfection; access to cleaning/hygiene materials; and reduction of shared supplies/equipment. ● Promote flu vaccination when available and COVID-19 vaccination (when it becomes available). ● Follow relevant CDC guidance for student foreign travel. ● Promote COVIDWISE, Virginia’s exposure notification app, to employees, parents/guardians, and students. ● Develop plans for holidays/breaks/large gatherings, etc. with considerations for extra testing, different schedules, and communication methods.
Physical Distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make physical distancing recommendations for IHEs. ● Use case, contact, and outbreak data to inform recommendations for disease prevention and control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop plans to increase physical distancing in classrooms, dormitories/residence halls, dining halls, common areas, etc. ● Develop contingency plans to halt classes and shut down in-person campus operations if disease spreads to levels where in-person learning cannot be conducted safely. ● Communicate to parents and students about plans. ● Follow relevant Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidance and CDC guidance for other considerations for IHEs.
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assist in identifying resources for diagnostic testing for IHEs, including private and public testing options. ● Encourage automated reporting of lab results in a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure access to diagnostic testing for COVID-19, including adequate capacity to obtain, administer, and process those tests.

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	<p>machine-readable format to public health to improve the timeliness of reporting, decrease data entry burden/errors, and improve completeness of lab data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For IHEs conducting their own lab testing, partner with public health to implement reporting of all minimum data fields for SARS-CoV-2 results (positive and negative) in a timely manner, in a machine-readable format, with a goal of automated electronic laboratory reporting (ELR). ● Report all test results to the health department if the school receives a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certificate of waiver and provides point-of-care (POC) COVID-19 antigen testing (required by the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act).
<p>Identification and Follow-up of Persons with Symptoms of or a Positive Test for COVID-19, Referred to as “Cases”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follow-up on reports of suspected and confirmed cases. Ensure that cases are isolated appropriately and released from isolation, based on the VDH protocol for discontinuing isolation. ● Interview cases to identify potential source(s) of exposure and identify all close contacts. ● Enroll cases in monitoring with LHD. ● Partner with Student Health Center to assess any potential workplace exposures and enroll exposed staff into monitoring. ● Preserve the anonymity of patients and practitioners, according to §32.1-41 of the <i>Code of Virginia</i>. In situations where divulging a patient’s name may be required to identify other potentially exposed individuals, VDH will seek permission from the patient for release of information; the information will be released to the minimal number of people who have a need to know it (such as to a single point of contact in the Student Health Center). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distribute educational messages to students about COVID-19 symptoms and steps to take if they become ill. ● Ensure that Student Health Centers can safely evaluate ill students. Partner with LHD to assess any potential exposures and enroll exposed staff into monitoring. ● Report suspected and confirmed cases to LHD. Assist public health in follow-up of cases, such as in identifying students sharing a classroom or dorm. ● Ensure appropriate housing is identified for cases during their isolation period (ideally single room with private bathroom). ● Protect the confidentiality of students, faculty, and staff who are part of case and contact Investigations. ● Implement recommendations for cleaning/disinfection, including areas where cases have been (rooms, dorms, classrooms, buildings, etc.).
<p>Follow-up with Contacts of Cases</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicate with all contacts identified by the cases to the extent possible. As applicable, place close contacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assist with outreach to students identified as contacts, as requested by LHD.

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	<p>in quarantine, have them enroll in the Sara Alert monitoring system, and refer them for testing; see here for more details. Provide disease control recommendations (e.g., wear a mask, watch their distance, and wash hands frequently).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release from quarantine as indicated, or coordinate for medical care/evaluation if symptoms develop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate housing is identified for contacts during their quarantine period (ideally single room with private bathroom). • Assist with coordination of medical evaluation for students who live on campus.
Essential Needs of Students and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local government, community organizations, and the IHE to ensure that essential needs are met for students and staff in isolation or quarantine who do not live on campus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that essential needs are met for those who live on campus and are in isolation or quarantine, including meals, medications, and necessary supplies, such as toiletries. • Identify a designated area outside to allow students in isolation or quarantine to safely enjoy time outdoors.

Resources:

VDH website for Institutions of Higher Education: vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/institutes-of-higher-education/

Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidance: governor.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Higher-Education-Reopening-Guidance.pdf

Summary of changes since the previous version (December 13, 2020)

- Link added to VDH exposure page