

Role of VDH and K-12 Schools in COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Efforts

Topic	Public Health Role	Role of K-12 Schools
<p>Communication and Coordination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that schools have contact information for Local Health Department (LHD) staff. ● Ensure that schools have access to summary information on the number of cases and contacts in the jurisdiction, district, and/or region to provide situational awareness for schools. Ensure that anonymity of individuals is preserved and that K-12 schools have data necessary for adequate planning and preparations. ● Address questions and concerns of K-12 teachers, 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 school 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, class and bus seating charts, extracurricular activities). ● 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 LHD. ● Ensure that students/teachers/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 [only for clinical staff] and masks, also known as cloth face coverings, in schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that clinical staff have access to PPE. ● Ensure that students and staff have access to masks. Encourage the use of masks in students and staff, when appropriate and

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<p>Prevention Strategies</p>	<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 notifications app, to employees, parents/guardians, and students (with parent/guardian permission) of K-12 schools who have mobile phones. 	<p>feasible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become familiar with the Interim Guidance: Operational Strategy and Phased Prevention for Virginia PreK-12 Schools and implement prevention strategies accordingly ● Widely communicate messages about health screenings, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, steps to take if illness develops/staying home while ill, use of masks, and physical distancing. ● Develop a plan for increased environmental cleaning and disinfection; access to cleaning/hygiene materials; reduction of shared supplies/equipment; and ways to maximize ventilation. ● Promote COVIDWISE, Virginia’s exposure notifications app, to employees, parents/guardians, and students (with parent/guardian permission) of K-12 schools who have mobile phones. ● Develop plans for holidays/breaks/large gatherings, etc. with considerations for different schedules, COVID-19 testing requirements, and communication methods.
<p>Physical Distancing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide physical distancing recommendations for schools. ● Use case, contact, and outbreak data to inform recommendations for physical distancing and school closure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop plans to increase physical distancing in classrooms, food/dining areas, etc., including modifying the layout of classrooms, common areas and buses. ● Develop contingency plans to halt classes and shut down in-person operations if disease spreads to levels where in-person learning cannot be conducted safely. Determining this level will require a case-by-case assessment that involves the LHD.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate to parents and students about plans. • Follow guidance in the Interim Guidance: Operational Strategy and Phased Prevention for Virginia PreK-12 Schools for school-related sports and other recreational activities.
Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure schools are aware of current COVID-19 testing recommendations and resources. • Coordinate specimen collection to confirm the presence of an outbreak in a school setting. This may be done through partnership with providers in nearby healthcare facilities (e.g., doctor offices, urgent care, hospitals located close to a school). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit the CDC Operational Strategy for K12 Schools-Testing section and the VDH K12 Testing webpage to learn more about screening testing programs in schools • Encourage COVID-19 testing of individuals with COVID-19 symptoms and of others for whom testing is recommended. • Consider school policies that strongly encourage or require participation in screening testing programs for unvaccinated students and supervising adults as a condition of participation in extracurricular activities or athletics. • Consider school policies to require screening testing of unvaccinated students and supervising adults prior to large school-sponsored events (e.g., prom, homecoming, etc.) • 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).
Vaccination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure schools are aware of local opportunities for COVID-19 vaccination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote routine childhood vaccination, seasonal flu vaccination and COVID-19 vaccination for those who are eligible. • Consider becoming a vaccine provider. • Consider partnering with local health department to

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		<p>provide school-based vaccination clinics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider asking parents/guardians to voluntarily provide students' COVID-19 vaccination information and staff to provide their own.
<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 the LHD. Partner with schools to assess any potential workplace exposures. 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/adult proxy for release of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist public health in follow-up, such as in identifying students and staff sharing a classroom or common area. Distribute educational messages to parents and students about COVID-19 symptoms and steps to take if they become ill. Ensure that school clinics can safely evaluate ill students. Partner with LHD to assess any potential exposures and refer exposed staff for LHD monitoring. Protect the confidentiality of students and staff who are part of case and contact investigations. Implement recommendations for cleaning/disinfection, including areas where cases have been (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. Place close contacts in quarantine and refer them for testing if they are not fully vaccinated or recently recovered from COVID-19. Have them enroll in the Sara Alert monitoring system. Provide disease control recommendations (e.g., get vaccinated, wear a mask, watch their distance, and wash hands frequently). Release from quarantine as indicated, or recommend and follow up on medical care/evaluation if symptoms develop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist with outreach to students and staff identified as contacts, as requested by LHD and described here.
<p>Essential Needs of Students and Staff*</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with local government, community organizations, and the school to ensure that essential needs are met for students and staff who are in isolation or quarantine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist in identifying students/staff who may not be able to meet their essential needs while in isolation or quarantine.*

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* Schools with boarding programs should ensure appropriate housing for students in isolation or quarantine as well as other essential needs, including the delivery of meals and access to items such as toiletries.

Resources:

VDH website for K-12 Education: vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/k-12-education/

Virginia Department of Education Return to School Plan: doe.virginia.gov/support/health_medical/covid-19/recover-redesign-restart.shtml#

Summary of changes since the previous version (May 27, 2021)

- Added links to VDH and CDC resources for masking, hand hygiene, physical distancing, etc.

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

- Under Communication and Coordination, changed to LHD ensuring access to COVID-19 data instead of communicating the data to the school.
- Under Prevention Strategies, added references to the Operational Strategy and Phased Prevention guidance and ventilation and deleted bullet about vaccination.
- Under Testing, added that the LHD ensures the school is aware of testing recommendations and expanded testing in schools beyond those with symptoms; added language about considering different types of school testing policies; [Added links to CDC testing information and VDH K12 Testing webpage.](#)
- [Added separate Vaccination section.](#)

Summary of changes since the previous version (October 23, 2020)

- Added hyperlinks to direct reader to the 'When It Is Safe to be Around Others' infographic that illustrates when to end isolation and quarantine.
- Updated information about reporting to VDH and DOLI.