**VDH Interim Guidance for Reinstating Community Mitigation Measures in K-12 School Settings**

To guide decisions about community mitigation measures needed to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on Virginians, VDH recommends local government and school officials work with local health districts to evaluate epidemiologic and other data to assess the extent of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) transmission within their region, its effect on Virginians, and the ability of the healthcare system to function. These data should then be interpreted within the context of the local jurisdiction. VDH recommends that decisions to alter K-12 school programming, including school dismissals or closures be handled at the most local level possible, considering both regional and local epidemiology, community characteristics, and local capacity. VDH created a dashboard for local health departments to use to answer the following questions in each region:

- What is the COVID-19 case incidence rate, and is it increasing or decreasing?
- What is the rate of COVID-19 outbreaks, and is it increasing or decreasing?
- What is the rate of ED visits for COVID-like illness, and is it increasing or decreasing?
- What is the rate of current confirmed COVID-19 ICU hospitalizations, and is it increasing or decreasing?
- What is the PCR test percent positivity for COVID-19, and is it increasing or decreasing?
- What percent of COVID-19 cases are among healthcare workers, and is the percent increasing or decreasing?
- What percent of hospital beds are currently occupied, and is the percent increasing or decreasing?
- How many hospitals are reporting trouble acquiring Personal Protective Equipment, and is the number increasing or decreasing?

The indicators in the dashboard are evaluated to determine composite scores for the burden of COVID-19 in the region (none, low, moderate or high) and the recent trend (increasing, steady or decreasing). These scores are used to determine whether the region is experiencing a minimal, moderate or substantial level of community transmission. Schools can consider adopting community mitigation measures, described in Phase Guidance for Virginia Schools, commensurate with the level of community transmission. More detail is provided below.

<u>**Considerations for Schools in Regions Experiencing MINIMAL Community Transmission**</u>

**Local Health Departments**

- Keep local government and school officials apprised of the extent of COVID-19 transmission in their area and strategies to contain the spread of the virus (e.g., public messaging, recommendations for school settings).

**Schools**

- Maintain communication with local health departments and maintain awareness of the extent of COVID-19 transmission in the community.
- Maintain communication plans with staff, parents, and students regarding changes in this status.
- Maintain readiness to implement alterations in programming and mitigation strategies if COVID-19 transmission increases in the community.
- Consider applicable Phase III Guidance for Virginia Schools for recommendations on the scope of programming and mitigation strategies to prevent future transmission. Remote learning exceptions and teleworking should be options for students and staff who are at high risk of severe illness (as defined by the CDC).
- Promote public messaging regarding COVID-19 mitigation (see below).
- Consider the relevant Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) 16VAC25-220, Emergency Temporary Standard, which provides guidance for employers regarding COVID-19. More information can be found in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs webpage.

**Public Messaging**

- Promote healthy hygiene practices.
- Children should stay up-to-date on vaccines and well-checks with their primary care providers.
- Wear a cloth face covering while in public and when around other individuals who are not part of your household.

- Follow recommendations for physical distancing when attending social gatherings or while in public spaces.
- Encourage students and teachers to avoid large gatherings and other events or activities that may have high potential for COVID-19 transmission.

**Considerations for Schools in Regions Experiencing LOW Community Transmission**

**Local Health Departments**

- Keep local government and school officials apprised of the extent of COVID-19 transmission in their area and strategies to contain the spread of the virus (e.g., public messaging, recommendations for school settings).
- Communicate and reinforce Phase III Guidance for Virginia Schools recommendations.

**Schools**

- Consider Phase III Guidance for Virginia Schools for recommendations on the scope of programming and mitigation strategies.  Priority should be given to providing in-person instruction to the most vulnerable students (e.g., students with disabilities, preschool through third grade students, English learners).
- Remote learning exceptions and teleworking should be options for students and staff who are at high risk of severe illness (as defined by the CDC).
- Promote public messaging regarding COVID-19 mitigation (see below).
- Consider the relevant Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) 16VAC25-220, Emergency Temporary Standard, which provides guidance for employers regarding COVID-19.  More information can be found in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs webpage.

**Public Messaging**

- Wear a cloth face covering while in public and when around other individuals who are not part of your household.
- Follow recommendations for physical distancing when attending social gatherings or while in public spaces.
- Encourage students and teachers to avoid large gatherings and other events or activities that may have high potential for COVID-19 transmission.

**Considerations for Schools in Regions Experiencing MODERATE Community Transmission or APPROACHING MODERATE Community Transmission**

**If Locality/Region is AT MODERATE Community Transmission, the following mitigation strategies should be strongly considered for immediate implementation if not already in place.  If Locality/Region is APPROACHING MODERATE Community Transmission, planning for the following mitigation strategies should occur.**

**Local Health Departments**

- Collaborate with the VDH Central Office Community Mitigation Team to understand how COVID-19 is affecting the region and specific interventions that may be warranted.
- Formulate mitigation recommendations. Health directors in the region should convene to discuss data as a group and formulate collective recommendations for the region to the extent possible.
- Meet with local **government and school officials** to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting their area and potential interventions in school settings (e.g., stricter mitigation measures within schools or temporary school closures.)
- Work with school divisions to create messaging for schools to use to communicate with teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about how COVID-19 is affecting the area, the need for increased vigilance toward measures to control disease spread, and mitigation measures that may be needed in the school setting.
- Review COVID-19 Interim Testing Recommendations for K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs with school officials.

- Increase public messaging (see below).

**Schools**
- Consider the [Phase II Guidance for Virginia Schools](#) for recommendations on the scope of programming and mitigation strategies, including:
    - Prioritize in-person instruction for the most vulnerable students (e.g., students with disabilities, preschool through third grade students, English learners).
    - Provide necessary services to vulnerable populations (e.g., children with special needs) and other children at most risk from missing in-person instruction.
    - Consider remote learning options for older students.
    - Remote learning exceptions and teleworking should be options for students and staff who are at high risk of severe illness (as [defined by the CDC](#)).
    - Eliminate or limit extracurricular activities that are not for the purpose of providing childcare.
    - Cancel social activities and gatherings that are not part of providing regular school services.
    - Require the use of [cloth face coverings](#) for staff and students (as developmentally feasible).
    - Adhere strictly to [physical distancing](#) recommendations (i.e., separate individuals by at least six feet).
    - Offer child care to working parents.
- Increase public messaging (see below), with focused messages to those individuals who may be at [more risk for severe illness](#).
- Consider the relevant Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) [16VAC25-220, Emergency Temporary Standard](#), which provides guidance for employers regarding COVID-19. More information can be found in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs [webpage](#).

**Public Messaging**

- Limit social gatherings, especially indoors, and follow recommendations for [physical distancing](#).
- Limit mixing between groups at schools to the extent possible (this may include not participating in extracurricular activities or other social activities outside of school).
- Wear a cloth face covering while in public places and when around other individuals who are not part of your household.
- Limit social gatherings to 50 individuals or fewer, especially indoors, and follow recommendations for [physical distancing](#).
- Protect [high-risk individuals](#) by avoiding public events, wearing [cloth face coverings](#) in public, and practicing proper [hand hygiene](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#).


**Considerations for Schools in Regions Experiencing SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission**

**If Locality/Region is AT SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission, the following mitigation strategies should be strongly considered for immediate implementation if not already in place. If Locality/Region is APPROACHING SUBSTANTIAL Community Transmission, planning for the following mitigation strategies should begin.**

**Local Health Departments**

- Collaborate with the VDH Central Office Community Mitigation Team to understand how COVID-19 is affecting the region and specific interventions that may be warranted.
- Formulate mitigation recommendations. Health directors in the region should convene to discuss data as a group and formulate collective recommendations for the region to the extent possible.
- Meet with local government and school officials to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting their area and potential interventions in school settings.

- Work with school divisions to create messaging for schools to use to communicate with teachers, parents, and other stakeholders about how COVID-19 is affecting the region, the need for increased vigilance toward measures to control disease spread, and mitigation measures that may be needed in the school setting.
- Review COVID-19 Interim Testing Recommendations for K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs with school officials.
- Increase public messaging (see below).

**Schools**

- Consider Phase II and Phase I Guidance for Virginia Schools for recommendations on the scope of programming and mitigation strategies, including:

  - Limit in-person instruction to the most vulnerable students (e.g., students with disabilities, preschool through third grade students, English learners).
  - Provide necessary services to vulnerable populations (e.g., children with special needs and at most risk from missing in-person instruction.)
  - Remote learning exceptions and teleworking should be options for students and staff who are at high risk of severe illness (as defined by the CDC).
  - Remote learning should be considered as the primary method of instruction, as described in Phase I Guidance for Virginia Schools.
  - Eliminate or limit extracurricular activities that are not for the purpose of providing childcare.
  - Cancel social activities and gatherings that are not part of providing regular school services.
  - Require the use of cloth face coverings for staff and students (as developmentally feasible).
  - Adhere strictly to physical distancing recommendations (i.e., separate individuals by at least six feet).
  - Offer child care to working parents.
- Increase public messaging (see below), with focused messages to those individuals who may be at more risk for severe illness.
- Consider the relevant Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) 16VAC25-220, Emergency Temporary Standard, which provides guidance for employers regarding COVID-19. More information can be found in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs webpage.

**Public Messaging/Communication**

- Wear a cloth face covering while in public places and when around other individuals who are not part of your household.
- Limit social gatherings, especially indoors, and follow recommendations for physical distancing.
- Limit mixing between groups at schools to the extent possible (this may include not participating in extracurricular activities or other social activities outside of school).
- Protect high-risk individuals by avoiding public events, wearing cloth face coverings in public, and practicing proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

**Notes**

The VDH Central Office Community Mitigation Team will meet weekly to identify geographic areas with increased transmission. The team will convene the local health directors from affected regions to review and discuss strategies that could reduce the impact on localities. Local health districts will submit recommendations to Community Mitigation, who will forward them to VDH Senior Leadership for review and then to the SHHR/Governor's office for consideration.

**VDH Interim Guidance for Reinstating Community Mitigation Measures in K-12 School Settings**

**References**:

White House Opening Up America Again:  https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/

CDC Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-mitigation.html

CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf

CDC Considerations for Schools: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html

Resolve to Save Lives Fact Sheet (Draft): When and How to Close due to COVID-19 Spread: https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COV020_WhenHowTightenFaucet_v3.pdf

Prevent Epidemics COVID-19 Playbook https://preventepidemics.org/covid19/resources/playbook/#Response-4-2

COVID-Local Metrics for Phased Reopening (RAND): https://covid-local.org/metrics/

The Urgency and Challenge of Opening K-12 Schools in the Fall of 2020, Sharfstein and Morphew, JAMA 2020: https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2766822

COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Reentry, American Academy of Pediatrics. https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/

CDC Decision Tree for School Reopening:  https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/Schools-Decision-Tree.pdf

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020. *Reopening K-12 Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Prioritizing Health, Equity, and Communities.*  Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press. https//doi.org/10.17226/25858

**Examples from other states**:
 New York: https://forward.ny.gov/ny-forward

California: https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/07/17/governor-gavin-newsom-lays-out-pandemic-plan-for-learning-and-safe-schools/


**Revisions were made on August 31, 2020 to reflect the following:**
- Added links to Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) guidance for employers
- Added "Approaching Moderate" and "Approaching Substantial" categories to reflect technical changes in dashboard.