

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) are offering the Virginia School Screening Testing for Assurance (ViSSTA) program, which provides COVID-19 testing to K-12 schools across the Commonwealth through July 2023.

While the ViSSTA program will support screening testing, VDH has additional diagnostic testing and Test to Stay resources, with more information available on the [VDH K-12 Schools Testing Webpage](#).

Screening testing is the regular testing of asymptomatic individuals to identify asymptomatic and presymptomatic cases of COVID-19 with the aim of catching cases early and stopping further transmission. Through the program, VDH/VDOE will match school divisions/schools with testing vendors that will conduct on-site testing. VDH/VDOE will also provide schools with staff and resources to support program implementation and assist in COVID-19 mitigation. COVID-19 testing is intended for school students, staff, and teachers and will be voluntary; only individuals who consent will be tested.

Why conduct COVID-19 screening testing in schools?

Create Resilient Schools

The [CDC](#) recommends that schools consider implementing COVID-19 screening testing when [COVID-19 community levels](#) are medium or high and to consider maintaining screening testing infrastructure when levels are low to make it easier to scale up later if levels increase. Research supports the value of screening testing to limit spread and increase caregiver confidence in sending children back to school. Please refer to the [CDC K-12 COVID-19 Guidance Website](#) for more information.

Support Equitable Access to Education and Health Resources

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected certain groups, such as people of color and individuals who earn lower incomes. These individuals may be more likely to live in an area that is medically underserved, and therefore, less likely to have access to healthcare resources in the community. Children are particularly impacted by social determinants of health and schools can play an important role in providing equitable access to healthcare resources, such as testing, to vulnerable groups.

Additionally, every student deserves to feel safe during school, including children who are considered higher risk due to underlying health conditions. Screening testing programs provide a layer of protection that can help ensure these students have equal access to the classroom. This prevention layer is even more critical as many schools relax other mitigation measures such as mask-wearing and as many children remain unvaccinated.

How will VDH and VDOE support schools that conduct testing?

Through a CDC grant, VDH/VDOE will partner to provide testing vendors, supplies, staffing, and incentives to schools with the goal of maximizing resources available to schools to navigate full in-person instruction and minimizing added work to existing school staff.

- **Contractors to conduct PCR testing:** VDH will contract with vendors that provide PCR testing. Vendors will provide end-to-end services for testing, including: providing testing supplies, conducting testing on-site, and notifying results.
- **Specialized event support:** Testing plans may include requests for staff and testing supplies to help schools safely hold extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, performing arts), large gatherings or events such as proms and graduation ceremonies, and host testing for after a holiday such as summer vacation.
- **School-based and regional staff (available for public schools):** VDH/ VDOE will fund additional staff that schools require to support the testing program. This might include additional school-based nurses to advise on medical matters and mitigation/containment and administrative staff to support coordination.
- **Technology and supplies (available for public schools):** VDOE can provide funding for supplies to implement the program including technology resources and infrastructure (e.g., outdoor tents).

What are the next steps?

School divisions should indicate their intent to participate in the testing program to VDH/VDOE. VDH/VDOE has distributed a survey to all Superintendents via email to capture this information. School divisions are asked to complete the survey as fully as possible to assist in matching resources and vendors to schools; however, VDH is able to provide additional planning support to help divisions develop a program that is tailored to their purposes. Any additional questions regarding the VisSTA testing program can be sent to testinginfo@vdh.virginia.gov.

Last updated 7/6/2022