



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health  
P O BOX 2448  
RICHMOND, VA 23218

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Dear Virginia Department of Education Partners,

The Virginia Department of Health shares the goal of keeping our school communities informed and healthy. Please read below for an update on respiratory illness guidance as we start the new school year.

On May 16, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released [Guidance for Preventing Spread of Infections in K-12 Schools](#). This new guidance consolidates and simplifies previous recommendations intended specifically for K-12 school settings and is aligned with [CDC's respiratory virus guidance](#). The K-12 guidance recommends best practices for preventing the spread of many common respiratory and stomach infections. These strategies can also reduce the spread of many other infectious diseases in schools.

CDC's respiratory virus guidance applies to non-healthcare settings, including schools, and provides recommendations for how people can protect themselves and their communities from respiratory diseases, such as COVID-19, flu, and RSV.

### **The recommendations include core prevention strategies:**

- **Staying up to date with vaccinations**
  - Provide [information about recommended vaccines](#) to staff, students, and families.
  - **Promote** the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.
  - Establish supportive policies that make it easy and convenient to get vaccinated.
  - Make vaccinations available on-site by hosting school-located vaccination clinics, or connect eligible children, students, teachers, staff, and families to off-site vaccination locations.
- **Handwashing**
  - Teach and reinforce [proper handwashing](#), especially during [key times](#) (e.g., after coughing/sneezing, before and after eating, and after using the restroom).
  - Provide adequate handwashing supplies (e.g., soap, water, paper towels) within easy reach. If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be provided (use under adult supervision for children under six years of age).
  - Post [handwashing signs](#) (reminder and how to), especially in key areas (restrooms).

- **Practicing good hygiene**
  - Reinforce [covering of the mouth and nose](#) with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and throwing tissues in the trash, followed by handwashing.
  - Provide tissues in convenient areas (classrooms, work/play stations).
  - Remind students and staff to sneeze into the elbow, not the hands, if tissues are not available.
- **Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting**
  - [Clean and sanitize](#) frequently touched surfaces often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, keyboards, faucet handles, phones, and toys.
  - Immediately clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled with body fluids, using personal protective equipment (PPE).
  - Refer to local policy or other regulations for procedures on disinfecting specific areas of the school (e.g., food services areas, school health clinics, bathrooms).
- **Taking steps for cleaner air**
  - [Improve air quality](#) by increasing airflow or cleaning the air.
  - Ensure existing HVAC systems are providing the minimum outdoor air ventilation requirement in accordance with ventilation design codes.
  - If safe, open windows to increase ventilation.
    - Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows. Fans will help draw outdoor air into classrooms and other spaces.
  - Use portable air cleaners in spaces with low ventilation.
  - Hold some activities outside, such as lunch, certain classes, or recess/social periods.
  - Keep bus windows open when it does not create a safety or health hazard.

**People sick with a respiratory virus, including COVID-19, flu, and RSV should:**

- Stay home, away from others and follow school policies.
- [Get treatment](#) promptly, if recommended by a healthcare provider.
- People can go back to normal activities when both of these are true for at least 24 hours:
  - Their symptoms are getting better overall, **AND**
  - They have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication).
- People may still be contagious and able to spread the virus, even if they are feeling better. People can choose to add precautions like taking [steps for cleaner air](#), [hygiene](#), [masks](#), [physical distancing](#), and/or [testing to reduce the risk of spreading illness to others](#).

Schools are required to report the presence or suspected presence of an outbreak to their [local health department](#) (LHD) per the Code of Virginia ([12VAC5-90-90](#)). Suspected outbreaks can be reported to your local health department using [VDH's Suspected Outbreak Reporting Portal](#) or by calling your LHD.

For more information, visit:

- [VDH Preventing Respiratory Viruses in K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs](#)
- [VDH Precautions When Sick Webpage](#)
- [CDC Respiratory Virus Guidance](#).
- [VDH Communicable Disease Chart](#)

- [VDH Respiratory Disease Communication Toolkit](#)

Thank you for your continued support. Have a healthy school year!

Virginia Department of Health