



JUNE 15, 2020

PHASE GUIDANCE FOR VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

The following guidance is intended to mitigate risk of COVID-19 transmission in public and private preK-12 school settings, while supporting the resumption of peer-to-peer learning and providing crucial support for parents and guardians returning to work.

These recommendations should be implemented in accordance with the [Forward Virginia Blueprint](#), any existing Executive Orders, [CDC Interim Guidance for Schools and Daycamps](#), [CDC Considerations for Schools](#), and in partnership with local and state public health officials. The school reopening phases are aligned with the existing Forward Virginia phases, through which the state will progress by monitoring public health data and key measures on disease transmission, healthcare capacity, testing capacity, public health capacity to trace contacts of cases, and other relevant factors. Community mitigation strategies (e.g. physical distancing, enhanced cleaning, etc.) will be necessary across all phases to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

This guidance document, which is aligned with the interim CDC guidance for schools, serves as a recommendation for Virginia schools to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19. Divisions should make decisions on implementing such guidance, and assuming additional risk, in consultation with local health departments and school board attorneys. Public health conditions and practical limitations may inform decisions to deviate from the guidance.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND

Per the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the more people a student or staff member interacts with and the longer the interaction, the higher risk of COVID-19 spread. As such, different activities come with different levels of risk:

- **LOWEST RISK:** Students and teachers engage in virtual-only classes, activities, and events.
- **MORE RISK:** Small, in-person classes, activities, and events. Groups of students stay together and with the same teacher throughout/across school days and groups do not mix. Students remain at least 6 feet apart and do not share objects (e.g., hybrid virtual and in-person class structures, or staggered/rotated scheduling to accommodate smaller class sizes).

- **HIGHEST RISK:** Full sized, in-person classes, activities, and events. Students are not spaced apart, share classroom materials or supplies, and mix between classes and activities.

Therefore, schools should include mitigation strategies detailed in CDC guidance to promote behaviors that reduce spread, maintain healthy environments and operations, as well as prepare for when someone gets sick.

PHASE I

Program Recommendations

- ✓ Remote learning is still the dominant method of instruction.
- ✓ School divisions may elect to provide in-person instruction for students with disabilities in both extended school year services and school year special education services, including private placements, with strict social distancing. Students will only attend such programs if the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team agrees it is appropriate and the parent consents. Virtual instruction may remain appropriate for certain students who may be challenged with adherence to the strict social distancing and safety guidelines as determined by the IEP team and the parents' consent.
- ✓ With the approval of the local division superintendent, or private school leader, accommodations may be offered for students to access the school building for critical instructional needs, such as accessing a secure assessment, if all health, safety and physical distancing measures are adhered to.
- ✓ As is currently permitted, child care for working families may operate in schools but are subject to existing operational requirements for childcare programs and should be focused on providing programming/care to children of working families and limited to children in the local geographic area.
- ✓ Divisions should notify VDOE of their intent to provide in-person instruction or programming that varies from the phase guidance. This notification is only required when exceeding the recommended programmatic offerings, or significantly deviating from the recommended health mitigation strategies in any phase.
- ✓ No athletics or extracurricular activities may be offered.
- ✓ Schools may continue to ensure provision of student services such as school meal programs.

Health, Safety and Physical Distancing Recommendations

- ✓ Schools should follow operational guidance from the CDC, including enhanced social distancing measures, physical distancing, and cleaning, disinfecting and other mitigation strategies.
- ✓ Physical distance should be created between children on school buses (e.g. seat children one per seat, every other row) limiting capacity as needed to optimize distance between passengers. In Phase 1, limit bus capacity to 10 persons to the extent possible.
- ✓ The number of persons in a classroom should not exceed 10, and physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- ✓ Other social distancing precautions should include, but are not limited to:
 - Restrict mixing classes/groups of students.
 - Close communal spaces.
 - No large gatherings, assemblies, etc., per the Governor’s Executive Order.
 - No athletics or extracurricular activities.

PHASE II

Programmatic Recommendations

- ✓ Extended school year and special education services that are allowed in Phase I may continue to operate.
- ✓ Emergency child care for working families which are allowed in Phase I may continue to operate.
- ✓ Summer camp in school settings may be offered to children of all ages. Programs should ideally be limited to children in the local geographic area.
- ✓ Schools may offer limited in-person instruction to preschool through third grade and English Learner students given the unique challenges of providing remote academic and social emotional support to young learners and English language learners.
- ✓ Divisions should notify VDOE of their intent to provide in-person instruction or programming that varies from the phase guidance. This notification is only required when exceeding the recommended programmatic offerings, or significantly deviating from the recommended health mitigation strategies in any phase.

- ✓ Schools may continue to ensure provision of student services such as school meal programs.
- ✓ Extracurricular activities (such as clubs) may be offered if social distancing mitigation strategies can be implemented.
- ✓ Athletics should be limited to individual or team-based practice, skill-building drills or conditioning activities that allow maintenance of physical distancing at all times.
- ✓ It is not recommended that youth recreational/school sports competition take place in Phase II, unless physical distancing can be maintained at all times (e.g. individual swimmers showing up at scheduled times to have their event timed, etc). Competition that involves contact with other athletes should be avoided.
- ✓ If socially distancing competitions are taking place, the following conditions should also be met:
 - Outdoor recreational sports are allowable if 10 feet of physical distance can be maintained by all participants and spectators at all times and all shared items can be disinfected between uses. The total number of attendees (including both participants and spectators) cannot exceed the lesser of 50% of the occupancy load of the venue (if an occupancy load exists) or 50 persons.
 - Indoor recreational sports (including practices and classes) may occur if 10 feet of physical distance can be maintained by all participants at all items and all shared items can be disinfected between uses. The total number of attendees (including participants, referees, coaches, etc.) cannot exceed the lesser of 30% of the occupancy load of the room in which the sport is being held or 50 persons. Spectators may not be present except parents or guardians who are supervising children. Spectators must wear face coverings consistent with any active Executive Orders and due to behaviors which may bring greater risk (e.g. cheering), it is recommended that spectators be separated by 10 feet of distance from other persons.

Health, Safety and Physical Distancing Recommendations

- ✓ Schools should follow operational guidance from the CDC, including enhanced social distancing measures, physical distancing, and cleaning, disinfecting and other mitigation strategies.
- ✓ Physical distance should be created between children on school buses when possible (e.g. seat children one per seat, every other row) limiting capacity as needed to optimize distance between passengers. Children (such as siblings) living together may sit together on the bus.
- ✓ Physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained to the greatest extent possible in all buildings. Other social distancing precautions should include, but are not limited to:
 - Restrict mixing classes/groups of students.
 - Close communal spaces.
 - Limited athletics and extracurricular activities.
 - Limit outdoor activities/recess to 50 people, with a priority on social distancing and restricting mixing of classrooms.
 - No gatherings (assemblies, graduations, etc) of more than 50 people (indoor or outdoor). Indoor gatherings should be held only as necessary, and be limited in duration.

PHASE III

Programmatic Recommendations

- ✓ In-person instruction may be offered for all students, however social distancing measures should be implemented.
- ✓ Remote learning exceptions and teleworking should be options for students and staff who are at a higher risk of severe illness.
- ✓ Mitigation strategies may impact operations and capacity limits. A multi-faceted instructional approach may need to be planned for Phase III.

Health, Safety and Physical Distancing Recommendations

- ✓ Divisions should notify VDOE of their intent to significantly deviate from the recommended health mitigation strategies in this phase too.
- ✓ Social distancing and other measures will remain important prevention strategies. Additional operational requirements will include measures such as physical distancing, gathering limits and other mitigation strategies (e.g. face coverings, class size limitations, etc). Schools should follow all guidance from the CDC.
- ✓ Physical distance should be created between children on school buses when possible (e.g. seat children one per seat, every other row) limiting capacity as needed to optimize distance between passengers. Children (such as siblings) living together may sit together on the bus.
- ✓ Physical distancing of at least 6 feet should be maintained to the greatest extent possible in all buildings. Other social distancing precautions should include, but are not limited to:
 - Consider restricting mixing classes/groups of students.
 - Consider closing or staggering the use of communal spaces.
 - Limit outdoor activities/recess to 50 people, with a priority on social distancing and restricting mixing of classrooms.
 - Large gathering limits to be determined by Executive Order in effect at that time.
 - Athletics and extracurricular activities may continue with some mitigation measures. More guidance will be forthcoming.

BEYOND PHASE III

- ✓ School divisions will return to a “new-normal” for instructional and extracurricular operations in consultation with public health officials.
- ✓ Some restrictions may still be recommended at such a time.
- ✓ Additional guidance will be forthcoming as public health data, safety precautions, and guidance evolve.

PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR ALL PHASES

Schools should follow all CDC guidance for reopening schools. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ✓ Implement strategies to prioritize the health of staff and students, mitigate disease transmission, and maintain healthy environments.
- ✓ Provide remote learning exceptions and teleworking options for students and staff who are at a higher risk of severe illness.
- ✓ Daily health screenings should be conducted for staff and students upon arrival. These should be done safely and respectfully, in accordance with privacy laws.
- ✓ At this time, public health is still developing its contact investigation guidance/outbreak response guidance for school settings.
- ✓ Staff and students should use cloth face coverings when physical distancing cannot be maintained, as is medically and developmentally appropriate. Face coverings are most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult.
- ✓ Cloth face coverings should be worn by staff in times when at least 6 feet physical distancing cannot be maintained. For example, a teacher standing in a classroom 7 feet from students could teach without a face covering. During meetings or gatherings or in narrow hallways or other settings where physical distancing may not be easy to maintain, a face covering would be prudent to wear. Other considerations such as speaking loudly, singing, etc should be considered and may require additional distance.
- ✓ The role of children in the transmission of COVID19 is unclear at this time. Face coverings may be challenging for students, especially younger students, to wear in all-day settings such as school.
- ✓ Cloth face coverings are most important to wear in times when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Schools will have other prevention strategies in place (e.g. health screenings, physical distancing, enhanced hygiene and cleaning protocols, limits on gatherings, etc).
- ✓ Schools should encourage the use of face coverings in students as developmentally appropriate in settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Schools should strongly encourage older students (e.g. middle or high school) to use face coverings in settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

LOCAL DIVISION PLANS

Health Plans Required of All Public and Private Schools

Before entering Phase II or III, every school in Virginia, public or private, is required to submit to the VDOE a plan outlining their strategies for mitigating public health risk of COVID-19; [per an Order of Public Health Emergency from the State Health Commissioner](#). The Virginia Council for Private Education (VCPE) will receive plans submitted by private schools accredited through a VCPE Approved State Recognized Accrediting Association. All private schools must submit health plans, regardless of affiliation with VCPE.

[Public schools should submit their plans online here.](#)

[Private schools should submit their plans online here.](#)

Notification of Public Division's Intent to Vary from Phased Guidance

Public school divisions should separately notify VDOE if they intend to vary from the phase guidance by exceeding the recommended programmatic offerings, or significantly deviating from the recommended health mitigation strategies in any phase.

[Intent to vary notifications can be submitted online here.](#)

2020-2021 Instructional Plans Required of All Public Schools

Additionally, public school divisions are required to submit a plan to the VDOE outlining the provision of new instruction to all students in the 2020-2021 academic year, regardless of phase or the operational status of the school at the time. This plan must also include strategies to address learning lost due to spring 2020 school closures and plans for fully remote instruction should public health conditions require it. School divisions must also post instructional plans on their websites for public viewing.

[Public school instructional plans should be submitted online here.](#)

**ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES TO PRINT AND DISPLAY
FOR ALL PHASES:**

- [Federal Partner Resources](#) (multiple languages)
 - CDC What You Need To Know
 - CDC Stop The Spread of Germs
 - CDC Symptoms of COVID-19
 - CDC What Do You Do If You Are Sick
- [CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again](#)
- [CDC Considerations for Schools](#)
- [CDC Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)
- [CDC What you Need to Know About Handwashing VIDEO](#)
- [Printable Handwashing Signs](#)
- [CDC Guidance for Child Cares That Remain Open](#)
- [CDC Guidance Keeping Children Healthy While School's Out](#)
- [CDC Decision Tree for Schools Reopening](#)
- [CDC Decision Tree for Youth Programs and Camps](#)
- [VDH Daily Symptom Monitoring Log](#) (in multiple languages)