



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

DATE: March 9, 2020
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Additional Resources Following First Cases of COVID-19 in Virginia**

The Virginia Department of Health is monitoring an outbreak of respiratory illness, called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by a novel (new) coronavirus that was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Virginia has three presumptive positive cases of COVID-19. Cases of COVID-19 are also being reported in a growing number of countries internationally, including the United States, where the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on January 21, 2020, in a traveler who had recently returned from Wuhan.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is committed to ensuring schools have the most current guidance in order to address concerns related to COVID-19. Please also refer to previous Superintendent's Memos related to this topic ([032-20](#), [051-20](#) and [062-20](#)). Local school divisions should consult the below resources and work collaboratively with their local health department office to ensure they are prepared to meet the challenges and potential disruptions this outbreak may create. The VDOE has continued to receive additional questions and will distribute a detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to Superintendents via email.

School divisions should review their pandemic influenza plans as part of their emergency operations plan and make revisions as needed. Ongoing communication among school division officials, local health department officials, and community leaders is vital. A [companion Superintendent's Memo](#) detailing the transmission of school absentee data to the Virginia Department of Health has been disseminated in order to assist local health departments in offering guidance and support to school divisions. School division leadership should also review methods of communicating with parents quickly and effectively. Alternate methods of instruction should be in place for extended absences or school closures.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has a dedicated [COVID-19](#) webpage with information and resources to assist schools with planning and preparation process. The VDOE also provides additional [resources](#) for schools and families.

For questions related to children who may experience flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms while at school refer to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare and Respond to COVID-19](#). Parents

should contact their local health department or health care provider for additional information and ongoing support. There is a 14-day social distancing or period of social isolation that is required before a student can return to school. Students who are in the VDH COVID-19 active monitoring program will receive a letter indicating they can return to school.

For questions about students who plan to travel or have recently traveled to areas with known community spread of COVID-19, refer to CDC [FAQ for travelers](#). Schools should also consult with state and local health department officials who can address travel specific questions and provide local information on testing and monitoring. Schools may need to postpone or cancel school trips that could potentially expose students and staff to the COVID-19 virus. Students returning from locations of known COVID-19 outbreaks must follow guidance they receive from health officials.

The monitoring of COVID-19 in Virginia is an ongoing and fluid situation. It is important to follow their local and state health department recommendations and implement [proactive health strategies](#) in schools to minimize the impact of the viral disease transmission.

Absences due to illness, quarantine or related restrictions should be considered excused absences. Schools should make every effort to minimize the impact of lost instructional time by providing at-home assignments or access to instructional supports. The [United States Department of Education \(ED\)](#) provides additional guidelines to help schools plan for extended absences or school dismissal. While it is not expected that chronic absenteeism rates will be affected by COVID-19, schools concerned by a possible impact may explore the opportunity for their local school board to appeal a performance level indicator for state accreditation, as outlined in [8VAC20-131-420](#).

Additional resources for schools include:

- The Virginia Department of Education, School Health Services webpage [Information for Virginia Schools on Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Virginia Department of Health [VDH, Guidance for Educational Administrators on the COVID-19 Outbreak \(2/27/20\)](#)
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US Childcare Programs and K-12 Schools to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- CDC [COVID-19 Situation Summary: Cases in the U.S.](#)
- CDC [Pre-School and Childcare Center Checklist](#)
- CDC [Recommended Cleaning Products and Processes](#)

With heightened attention focused on COVID-19 outbreaks, it is important for schools to note the anxiety and stress that accompanies a global pandemic. Children look to adults for guidance and reassurance during stressful events. [Talking to Children about COVID-19](#) is a useful resource for school staff, teachers, administrators, and parents. As shared in a [previous Superintendent's Memo](#) it is imperative that schools take action to prevent discrimination and/or harassment towards any student.

The Virginia Department of Education continues to work closely with the Virginia Department of Health in an effort to protect schools and communities. If you have questions, please contact Tracy White, School Health Specialist, at Tracy.White@doe.virginia.gov.

JFL/SMH