

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What should schools do about students or faculty returning from countries where COVID-19 is widespread or where local transmission has been reported?**

For travelers returning from mainland China, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will already have been alerted to the names and contact information of these individuals and they will work with these individuals to establish monitoring and provide the recommendation that they self-quarantine at home for 14 days.

For individuals arriving from countries with a Level 3 travel advisory, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends these individuals self-monitor their health while self-quarantining at home for 14 days. VDH does not receive information about these individuals as they do from travelers coming from mainland China. If these individuals become known to the VDH, they will reach out to them to make sure they understand the recommendations ([VDH Interim Guidance for Returning Travelers-Level 3](#)).

For individuals arriving from countries with a Level 2 travel advisory, the CDC requests these individuals practice social distancing and self-monitor their health for 14 days ([VDH Guidance for Returning Travelers- Level 2](#)).

### **What should schools do about student exchange programs?**

Schools should consider postponing or canceling student foreign exchange programs. For those students who are already abroad, consider facilitating travel home if the students express a desire to return to the United States. Similarly, consider facilitating travel for foreign exchange students expressing an interest in returning to their home countries. Even for countries without travel advisories, this recommendation is not due to transmission risk but practicality, including increased difficulty with international travel in general.

Schools choosing to maintain programs should evaluate the risks and take proactive measures and monitor the [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel](#) for the latest information.

### **What should schools do if a child is experiencing flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms?**

For questions related to children who may experience flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms while at school refer to the 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. Individuals who are not being monitored by the VDH monitoring program will need to follow local policies for any required documentation related to excusing absences or documenting a return to school.

### **What should schools do if a student or staff member is identified for testing?**

In the event that a student or a staff member qualifies for COVID-19 testing, they should be excused from school or work. A nonspecific letter from the local health department will be

provided for this purpose. A school may become aware of an individual undergoing testing for COVID-19 if they seek care with a school-based health provider (e.g. school nurse), but the VDH will not release the individual's information to the school if they are identified outside of this setting. The VDH will work with the school, as they do for other reportable conditions, to conduct contact tracings and to assist with public health community messaging.

**What should schools do if a student or faculty becomes a case?**

If the first case of COVID-19 is identified in a school, the VDH will be working closely with the school to make environmental cleaning recommendations, conduct contact tracing, and investigate any potential exposures to that individual. The VDH may also assist with communications to the student body, parents, faculty and staff.

**How does the Virginia Department of Education plan to address any impact the chronic absenteeism indicator may have on school accreditation ratings?**

If a school closes, then the chronic absenteeism indicator is not impacted because students are not considered absent when the school is closed.

The Standards of Accreditation (SOA) at *8VAC20-131-380.F.6* provide the opportunity for local school boards to appeal a performance level indicator for a school. The intent of the appeal provision in the SOA is to provide potential relief to schools that have experienced a significant event impacting performance on an indicator. Schools where student absences resulting from COVID-19 have an aggregate, negative impact the chronic absenteeism indicator will have the opportunity to submit an appeal. If this is the case, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) will be available to provide guidance on the chronic absenteeism indicator. It will be the responsibility of each individual division to provide student data to support the appeal.

**What may be done in cases where schools are closed for so many days that the 990 hour clock requirement cannot be met? How will school closures affect ADM funding?**

If a school or school division closes schools in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, they should make every effort to make up missed time, including using scheduled vacation days and planned school closure days as well as extending the length of the school day or calendar. Should any school in a school division miss more than five days as the result of an emergency situation, the school may make up teaching days or hours according to the schedule provided in [§ 22.1-98.C\(2\)](#) of the *Code of Virginia*. Funding based on average daily membership (ADM) would not be affected if divisions meet the 990 hour clock requirement or the emergency requirement as outlined in [§ 22.1-98](#).

If school divisions are still unable to meet these requirements, they can consider seeking a waiver from the Board of Education (BOE). The BOE has expressed they will be more flexible depending on the magnitude of the situation but waivers will only be granted to those schools or school divisions that have exhausted all means to make up for lost teaching time. Schools are reminded that any decision to close schools should be made in consultation with your local health department and in the interest of public health first. The VDOE does not provide recommendations regarding school closures.

**How should schools handle testing requirements in the case of an outbreak?**

The Spring 2020 Standards of Learning (SOL) writing test administration is currently underway. Should school divisions anticipate disruptions in testing due to COVID-19, Division Directors of Testing should contact the student assessment staff at the VDOE for further guidance.

The statewide testing window for the SOL tests in reading, mathematics, science, and history/social science opens on April 13, 2020, and extends through June 26, 2020. Each school division has identified a three to four week test window within the statewide window. Should school divisions need to change their testing schedules, they should contact the student assessment staff at VDOE.

The VDOE will consider additional flexibility should the need arise.

**What is the criteria for schools to close due to COVID-19?**

The VDOE does not provide recommendations regarding school closures. This is a local decision to be made in collaboration with your local health department.

The CDC has provided [interim guidance](#) for both schools that do and do not have identified cases of COVID-19 in their communities. The CDC advises that any student or staff that has traveled to/from a country with a Level 3 travel advisory be asked to stay home for 14 calendar days. The same restrictions are advised for newly registered students arriving from a country identified as Level 3. A link to this advisory information can be found [here](#). Please note that CDC guidance is only a recommendation for travelers, does not apply to family members, and is not mandatory. Local school divisions should continue to refer to CDC resources for the most up-to-date guidance on best practices for preventing the spread of COVID-19. The VDOE also advises local school divisions to work with its local health officials and school board counsel on appropriate health and safety practices as well as rights regarding quarantines for students and staff.

**Are schools able to continue instruction via online learning in the case of a COVID-19 outbreak within the division?**

It is important to separate the responsibility that school divisions have to provide continuity of education from the responsibility that school divisions have related to the number of clock hours.

The VDOE is very supportive of the use of distance learning methods, such as online learning, and any other strategies that are available to school divisions to support continuity of education. However, not all divisions may have the technology resources to implement distance learning methods on short notice. These divisions may consider other strategies, such as providing email assignments or work packets to parents to support continuity of education.

It is important to note that in order for educational services to count towards “make up days,” those services must be provided to all students, including preschool or early elementary students, students who don’t have access to technology at home and students receiving special education services. The VDOE remains open to exploring requests from school divisions that propose innovative learning models that can document equitable access to the curriculum, learning materials, teachers, and other school services.

**School divisions have been attempting to purchase cleaning supplies such as disinfecting wipes. There is a great deal of price gouging. Is there any talk of helping curtail this predatory behavior?**

The VDH has been getting similar reports from multiple sectors. The VDH is working on procuring supplies and identifying strong supply chains. Once they have this information, it will be communicated to other government agencies. In addition, should Virginia declare a state of emergency, there is specific guidance on how to pursue price gouging.

**What is recommended in classrooms for cleaning desks by teachers? (in addition to the regular cleaning that is done outside of school hours)**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued information about [cleaning products](#) that are registered for use against COVID-19. The CDC has a link for information related to [cleaning products and processes](#).

**Under what circumstances will a school be notified by the health department if a student or staff member tests positive?**

Schools would be notified if the health department is trying to conduct contact tracing of individuals within the student body or school environment. So, if an individual is confirmed as a positive case of COVID-19 the VDH would treat that as they would any other disease investigations (e.g. measles, chicken pox). They would talk to the individual and their family first, figure out who they have been in contact with; and if this involves individuals in the school setting, at that point VDH would engage with the school.

**Please tell us more about your recommendation that schools consider postponing or canceling student foreign exchange programs. Specifically, what are your thoughts about hosting international students from non-level 2 and non-level 3 nations for short term visits (two weeks)? Similarly, what are your thoughts about short trips (two weeks or less) by our students to non-level 2 and non-level 3 nations?**

The CDC has communicated that while there are no travel advisories or restrictions, it is important to note that this is a fluid process and travel advisories are subject to change at any moment. The recommendation from the CDC that schools consider postponing or canceling student foreign exchange programs from any country is based on the unpredictable logistical challenges that may emerge associated with international travel.

**What are your thoughts on travel within the United States?**

The CDC has communicated that there are currently no travel restrictions or travel advisories for travel within the United States. This is a fluid and ongoing issue that may change in the future.

**Has there been any discussion about how school divisions will provide for FAPE for students with disabilities in the event of school closures?**

If a school closure causes educational services for all students to pause within a school or division, then the school/division is generally not required to provide services to the affected students eligible for special education services during that same period of time. If a division has extended school closures, the division will remain responsible for the free appropriate public education (FAPE) of its students eligible for special education services with an individualized education program (IEP). After an extended closure, divisions are responsible for reviewing how

the closure impacted the delivery of special education and related services to students eligible for special education services. Additional specific guidance will be provided to division level special education directors.

**Will the state waive the 15-day drop period for students?**

The VDH recommends that students that are absent due to COVID-19 illness, related quarantine or social distancing not be dropped from school enrollment in order to allow for continuity in education.

Virginia regulations ([8VAC20-110-130](#)) state that students “*shall be dropped from the roll and marked “withdrawn”...3. When a pupil has been absent for 15 consecutive days or more*”

Based on the guidance from the VDH, school divisions may continue enrollment for students known to be absent due to illness, related quarantine or social distancing for COVID-19. Please be aware that this guidance is specific to the COVID-19 outbreak occurring during the 2019-2020 school year.

**How should divisions track students who are absent because of COVID-19 in the Student Information Systems?**

The VDOE encourages divisions to maintain attendance records of any student known to be absent due to COVID-19. This information would be required if a school wanted to appeal the chronic absenteeism indicator rating in accreditation.

Additionally, while VDOE is not aware of any future data requests or collections from state or federal agencies for student information, it is easier for divisions to track the data as it happens compared to later should a new data collection be mandated. Please note: VDOE can only collect such information if it was mandated by state code, federal law, or regulation.

**How should schools handle absences in cases where parents choose to keep their students at home due to fear of exposure (i.e. no illness or recommendation for self-quarantine)?**

Many schools, parents, and guardians have expressed concern about student absences related to COVID-19 safety concerns. Virginia attendance regulations ([8VAC20-730-10](#)) allow school leaders to excuse absences for a reason acceptable to the school administration, which may include illness or mental health condition. School divisions have the authority to define their “acceptable reason” for excused absences. The VDOE knows that community fears may be high as identified cases increase, particularly for families with loved ones living in the home who have a compromised immune system. The VDH recommends that school divisions exercise great caution when deciding not to excuse absences related to COVID-19.

**Additional questions for the Virginia Department of Health related to COVID-19 can be emailed to [respiratory@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:respiratory@vdh.virginia.gov)**