



JUNE 9, 2020

PHASE GUIDANCE FOR VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

The following guidance is intended to mitigate risk of COVID-19 transmission in public and private 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](#) and [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.

The phased approach to reopening schools provides the maximum allowable flexibility, and schools may be more limited in their in-person instructional offerings than the phase allows. Community mitigation strategies (e.g. physical distancing, enhanced cleaning, etc.) will be necessary across all phases to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

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.

- **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

Allowable Programs

- ✓ Phase I is effective immediately, but is not intended to change the school division's continuity of learning plans as they close the 2019-2020 school year.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ The State Superintendent may continue to consider variances for other in-person instruction on a case by case basis. Such programs must follow all mitigation guidance.
- ✓ 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 Measures

- ✓ 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

Allowable Programs

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ The State Superintendent may continue to consider variances for other in-person instruction on a case by case basis. Such programs should follow all physical distancing and mitigation guidance.

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ VDH recommends that no 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 must 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 Measures

- ✓ 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

Allowable Programs

- ✓ In-person instruction can be offered for all students, however strict social distancing measures must 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 Measures

- ✓ 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 in place 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

Before entering Phase II or III, every school in Virginia will be required to submit to the VDOE a plan outlining their strategies for mitigating public health risk of COVID-19. The Virginia Council for Private Education (VCPE) will receive plans submitted by private schools accredited through a VCPE Approved State Recognized Accrediting Association.

Additionally, public school divisions will be required to submit a plan for providing 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.

Health Plan and Instructional Plan guidance and submission forms will be on the VDOE website.

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)



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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State Health Commissioner

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ORDER OF THE STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

Order of Public Health Emergency

WHEREAS, the State Health Commissioner declared COVID-19 a disease of public health threat on February 7, 2020; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19 on March 12, 2020, in Executive Order No. 51 by virtue of the authority vested in the Governor by Article V, Section 7 of the Constitution of Virginia and by §§ 44-146.17 and 44-75.1 of the Code of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam closed all Virginia schools for the remainder of the academic year on March 23, 2020; and

WHEREAS, the Governor and State Health Commissioner issued Order of Public Health Emergency One on March 17, 2020, as amended on March 20, 2020, declaring a public health emergency; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 spreads from person-to-person, transmitted via respiratory droplets, and can be spread from an infected person who does not have symptoms to another person; and

WHEREAS, no current vaccine or known treatment options exist at this time; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Virginia seeks to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Virginia simultaneously seeks to allow students to safely resume in-person instruction and progress in their education; and


WHEREAS, pursuant to § 32.1-13 of the Code of Virginia, the State Health Commissioner, acting for the State Board of Health when it is not in session pursuant to § 32.1-20 of the Code of Virginia, is vested with authority to make separate orders to meet any emergency not provided for by general regulations, for the purpose of suppressing communicable, contagious, and infectious diseases.

NOW THEREFORE, the State Health Commissioner hereby issues this Order requiring every public school division and preK-12 private school in Virginia, before reopening in accordance with Phase II and III guidelines, to submit to the Virginia Department of Education a plan

outlining their strategies for mitigating the spread and public health risk of COVID-19 and consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Virginia Department of Health mitigation recommendations. Such plans shall include policies and procedures for the use of face coverings; health screenings of staff and students; physical distancing measures; enhanced hygiene practices for staff and students; isolation of symptomatic cases; and cleaning and disinfecting procedures and other topics as outlined in the Phased Guidance for Virginia Schools.

WHEREAS, this Order shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded by a further executive order.

Given under the Seal of the Office of the State Health Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 8th Day of June, 2020.


M. Norman Oliver

Guidance for Virginia Schools Submitting 2020-2021 Instructional Plans Under Virginia's Phased Reopening Plan

Providing New Instruction to All Students

All school divisions must provide new instruction to all students in the 2020-2021 school year, regardless of the operational status of a division's buildings or the reopening phase the state or locality is in.

Submitting Plans to the Virginia Department of Education

Pursuant to the *Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools*, each school division must develop a plan for providing new instruction for the 2020-2021 school year, submit it to the Virginia Department of Education and post it on the school division's website for public viewing. The posted plan should be submitted to the Virginia Department of Education for review 15 business days before the first day of the academic year. Plans should be submitted [online here](#).

School division plans should include these necessary components:

- **Operational Infrastructure to Support Learning** - plan for school schedules, transportation, technology, processes, systems, communication, etc.
- **New Instruction for All Students** - plan for providing new instruction to all students including the learning needs of all students equitably, with attention to vulnerable and special populations (including but not limited to students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, English learners, those students disconnected with school during the spring closure, students already identified as being part of a gap group, young learners, gifted students, etc.); preparing teachers through professional development; robust family engagement; and communication with stakeholders.
- **Identification of Instructional Gaps and Student Needs** - plan for identification of learning needs through formative assessment, supports for student success and well-being, revisions to curriculum, pacing, and instructional delivery.
- **Remote Learning** - contingency plan for ensuring continuity of new instruction should further closures be necessary

Please note, divisions are also required to submit COVID-19 mitigation health plans before reopening. Per an order of the Virginia Public Health Commissioner, each private school and public school division must develop a plan for implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies before reopening in accordance with the Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools. Plans must be submitted to the VDOE before offering in-person instruction in Phase II or Phase III. Guidance for these plans is available on the VDOE website, and [the submission form is online here for Phase II](#).



Virginia's Return to School Plan

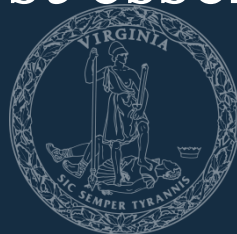
JUNE 9, 2020

**Schools will open for all students next year,
but instruction will look very different.**

Virginia schools are required to deliver
new instruction to all students for the 2020-2021 academic year.
Some of that will happen in-person, and some will take place via remote learning.

Virginia's Return to School Plan

- Aligns school reopening phases with the Forward Virginia Blueprint and phases.
- Scales up opportunities for in-person instruction beginning immediately.
- Addresses the health and social, emotional, and physical well being of students and staff.
- Prioritizes the needs of our most vulnerable learners, for whom in-person instruction is most essential.



The Three Phase Plan

Schools may offer the following in-person instructional options:

Phase I - special education programs and child care for working families

Phase II- Phase I options plus preschool - third grade students; English learners; and summer camps in school buildings

Phase III - all students may receive in-person instruction as can be accommodated with strict social distancing measures in place

Beyond Phase III - divisions will resume “new-normal” operations under future guidance

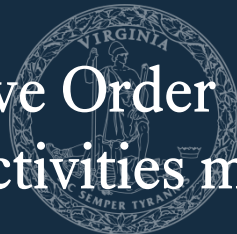
Phases provide maximum flexibility at any given time. Schools may be more limited in their in-person instructional offerings than the phase allows.

Before entering Phase II or III, all schools must submit plans to VDOE outlining compliance with VDH and CDC mitigation strategies. Public school divisions will also be required to submit a plan for providing new instruction to all students in the 2020-2021 academic year, regardless of phase or the operational status of the school at the time.



Phase I Looks Like This:

- Instruction will be predominately remote.
- In-person instruction may be offered for special education programs with social distancing measures; students will only attend such programs if all parties agree it is appropriate.
- Child care for working families can continue to be offered in schools.
- Social distancing measures should be implemented on buses and in buildings, including but not limited to:
 - ✓ A maximum of 10 people per bus or classroom
 - ✓ 6 foot separation whenever possible
 - ✓ Restrict mixing groups of students
 - ✓ Close communal spaces
 - ✓ No large gatherings per Executive Order
 - ✓ No athletics or extracurricular activities may be offered.



Phase II Looks Like This:

- Instruction will still be predominately remote.
- Phase I options continue. Additionally, in-person instruction may be offered for special education programs, preschool - third grade students, and/or English learners.
- Summer camps in school settings may be offered to students of any age.
- Social distancing measures should be implemented on buses and buildings, including but not limited to:
 - ✓ 6 foot separation whenever possible;
 - ✓ Restrict mixing groups of students;
 - ✓ 50 person limit on large gatherings, assemblies, graduations, etc.;
 - ✓ Close communal spaces if possible; otherwise stagger use and disinfect in between use; and
 - ✓ Limited extracurricular activities and athletics with mitigation strategies.



Phase III Looks Like This:

- Instruction will shift to include more in-person instruction, for any student. Remote instruction will supplement in person instruction for students.
- Child care and/or before and after care in schools may be offered.
- In order to accomplish social distancing, school plans may need to include staggered schedules for students.
- Social distancing measures should be implemented on buses and buildings, including:
 - ✓ 6 foot separation whenever possible
 - ✓ Large gathering limit, subject to updated Executive Order at the time
 - ✓ Consider restricting mixing groups of students, adjusting schedules, transitions, recess options, and instruction to accomplish this.
 - ✓ Athletics and extracurricular activities may be expanded with mitigation measures.



Some Precautions Apply To All Phases

All schools should follow the CDC Guidance for Schools, including enhanced social and physical distancing, health and hygiene procedures, cleaning and disinfecting measures, and other mitigation strategies. These precautions should include, but are not limited to:

- Daily health screenings of students and staff
- Providing remote learning exceptions and teleworking for students and staff who are at a higher risk of severe illness.
- The use of cloth face coverings by staff when at least 6 feet physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Encouraging the use of face coverings in students, as developmentally appropriate, in settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Detailed Guidance Documents

- **Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools** includes details for each phase
- The **May 2020 CDC Guidance for Schools** is the foundational public health guidance which should guide school plans
- **Recover, Redesign, Restart** is a comprehensive document, informed by diverse education stakeholders, for schools to utilize in their planning. It will be released by the Virginia Department of Education.

