



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

DATE: March 23, 2020
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children**

The Governor of Virginia ordered all K-12 schools in Virginia to close through the end of this academic year on March 23, 2020. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) will issue guidance to help local school divisions execute plans to continue instruction, while ensuring students are served equitably, regardless of income level, access to technology, English learner status or special needs. This includes options for additional instruction through summer programming, affording flexibility in course requirements and integrating instruction into coursework next year. The VDOE is also in contact with the federal government and is preparing a waiver for testing requirements. The VDOE has also been working closely with the Governor's Office, the Virginia Department of Health, and other state agencies to ensure our public schools and communities have the most up-to-date information and resources to be proactive and to respond to concerns about COVID-19. The health and safety of our children and staff are our top priorities. We continue to hear from parents and our school leaders about their concerns and understand the fears any parent may have. The VDOE has created the attached parent's guide to serve as a resource for parents, families and caregivers on a variety of topics related to COVID-19 and their students.

Continue to visit the VDOE [website](#) for additional updates and guidance on COVID-19. If you have questions, please contact the VDOE Department of Special Education and Student Services, at special.ed.assistantsuperintendent.memo@doe.virginia.gov.

JFL/SMH

Attachment

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

About COVID-19

Along with many areas around the world, the Commonwealth of Virginia is experiencing an expanding outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This virus can spread from person-to-person, and the number of diagnosed cases is growing. Accurate and up-to-date information about COVID-19 is available through the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the [Virginia Department of Health \(VDH\)](#) dedicated websites.

Symptoms of COVID-19

Symptoms of COVID-19 include: fever, cough and shortness of breath. Parents should remain vigilant and observe their children for [COVID-19 symptoms](#). If your child experiences these symptoms, contact your local health department or health care provider. Your doctor will decide if your child needs to be tested or be seen in person. Parents are encouraged to contact their doctor prior to an office visit in order to reduce viral transmission to others. Please note that individuals who are mildly ill may not need to be tested and should isolate (keep away from other people) and be taken care of at home.

Positively [diagnosed or students exposed to COVID-19](#) will receive information from VDH or their health care provider regarding management of this condition.

Exposure to COVID-19

If you or your child have been in close contact with confirmed cases of COVID-19, follow [VDH advice](#). The VDH recommends that you self-quarantine for 14 days from the date of the potential contact and monitor your health. For additional questions about staying home or monitoring your health, call 877-ASK-VDH3 (877-275-8343). If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, take [steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when you are sick](#).

Helping Your Child to be Resilient

Children may be anxious and will look to adults for guidance on concerns about COVID-19. The [National Association of School Psychologists \(NASP\)](#) and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) provide helpful resources for parents on talking to their children about COVID-19. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety. Specific guidelines include:

- Maintain a normal routine to the extent possible.
- Discuss new practices with your child to include activities that improve emotional health such as taking walks, calling a friend, exploring online educational or cultural opportunities, or creating an art project.
- Practice and model basic hygiene and healthy lifestyle practices.
- Be honest and accurate while remaining calm, easing fears and reassuring for your child.
- Limit exposure to news and media stories that may be upsetting.

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer additional tips for [managing stress and anxiety](#).

Planning for Self-Quarantine or Social Distancing

Self-quarantine is voluntarily staying home and avoiding going out in public to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19. A self-quarantine may be recommended in cases where there is a possible exposure to COVID-19, such as close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 or travel from a country with a [Level 3 travel health notice](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a period of 14 calendar days for self-quarantines.

To [prevent the spread](#) in communities, the CDC also recommends households to protect themselves and others by social distancing, which is avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance (about 6 feet) from others when possible. School closures are one form of social distancing. Children and families are also encouraged to practice social distancing in their daily lives while schools are closed. Social distancing means remaining out of:

- Public places where close contact with others may occur (such as shopping centers, movie theaters, stadiums)
- Workplaces (unless the person works in an office space that allows distancing from others)
- Schools and other classroom settings
- Local public transportation (such as on a bus, subway, taxi, rideshare, plane, ship)

The American Psychological Association (APA) offers [information about social distancing](#), the differences between quarantine and isolation, and ways to get the social support you need. For social distancing to be effective, parents are encouraged to limit playdates and activities to those where distance can be maintained from each other to avoid potential exposure to COVID-19.

While social distancing is important to reduce the spread of COVID-19, it is also resulting in limited work for some individuals and families. This can lead to financial insecurity. For recommendations for high school students and families, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has created a [guide to coping during hard times](#).

Planning for potential self-quarantines or social distancing will save time, frustration and anxiety for parents. It will also help children feel comforted and prepared for changes to their normal routine. This [preparedness checklist](#) will help parents take steps to lessen the impact of a severe coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on you and your family. Many of these steps are good advice to help you and your family during any disaster, like an earthquake or flood.

Cleaning Recommendations for the Home

Family members can practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks) with household cleaners and EPA-registered disinfectants that are appropriate for the surface, following label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product, including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product. The CDC provides additional guidance on [home cleaning](#) and disinfection of households.

Child Care for Essential Personnel

Parents and families who are in search of child care for essential personnel, which is currently permitted under the Governor's current order, can find more information on the [Child Care Aware website](#).

What Parents Can Expect from Schools

Governor Ralph Northam ordered all K-12 schools in Virginia to close for the remainder of the academic year in response to the continued spread of COVID-19. Schools will close from Monday, March 16, through Friday, March 27, at a minimum. Localities will maintain authority over specific staffing decisions to ensure students maintain continuity of services or learning, while protecting the public health of teachers and staff.

The VDOE has issued guidance to Virginia school divisions regarding COVID-19 via Superintendent's memos, emails, webinar, and links to resources. These communications are available on the VDOE's [COVID-19 and Virginia Public Schools webpage](#). The VDOE expects school divisions to be:

1. Communicating regularly with students, families, staff, and the larger school community.
2. Practicing routine cleaning and disinfecting procedures of commonly touched surfaces.
3. Maintaining an open line of communication with their local and state health officials.
4. Intentionally and persistently combating misinformation in regards to COVID-19.
5. Actively engaging in contingency planning for the possibility of extended school closures.

School Nutrition

The VDOE has been awarded a waiver from the USDA to approve waivers to allow school divisions to provide meals in non-congregate settings due to COVID-19. Parents and families can find sites approved for meal service on the [School Meal Finder website](#) (this information is continually updated and additional details with their school division). Families can also text "food" or "comida" to 877-877 to learn more about food options near them.

Graduation Requirements, Credits, and Continuity of Learning

The VDOE has thoughtfully considered the impact on local school divisions and students as a result of extended school closures. Ultimately local school divisions will make decisions about exactly how learning is continued for students. Additional VDOE guidance will address students graduating in the 2019-2020 school year, students enrolled in high school credit bearing courses graduating in 2020-2021 and after, and students in grades K-8 and students in preschool. This guidance will focus on alternative pathways to demonstrate learning and a focus on ensuring students are equitably prepared for success in subsequent courses

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

Grading and Grade Point Averages

The authority to award grades and determine grade point averages rests with local school divisions. School divisions have been asked to consider the guidance related to distance and online learning and the considerations regarding equity and a thoughtful approach to instruction, and the impact of alternative measures of achievement and mastery. Whereas the VDOE recognizes that decisions on grades are a local decision, the VDOE does not recommend grading work completed during the closures since schools are closed. Additionally, VDOE recognizes that grade calculations and GPA are a local policy issue. VDOE does recommend that school divisions establish a methodology to fairly calculate grades based on work previously completed and a methodology for including said grades in GPA calculations and on student transcripts. VDOE encourages school divisions to work closely with VDOE should they feel they need additional flexibility within the transcript regulations.

Learning at Home

Parents and families can support students' thinking and learning during extended school closures.

- Collaborate with your child to organize the day to include time for learning, activities and exercise.
- Read to and with your child and have conversations about what you have read together.
- Take a walk and ask about what your child is seeing and about being a good citizen.
- Encourage critical thinking through cooking together or planning a garden.
- Encourage conversations about mathematics in your child's day.
- Explore your child's creativity by creating art, music, or dance.
- Write a letter to a family member or friend or community hero.
- Be mindful of screen time and have alternatives for children to play outside.
- Listen to your child about his or her feelings and fears and offer comfort, honesty, and reassurance.

The VDOE encourages you to review resources provided by your local school division, public libraries, public media, civic and community groups, and other resources, including those found on the Department's website - search for "families" or visit the VDOE [For Families webpage](#).

Students with Disabilities

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 school division does begin to offer instructional services by alternative means, 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). Once school resumes, the school must return to providing special education and related services to students with disabilities in accordance with the student's IEP, or for students entitled to FAPE under Section 504, consistent with any plan developed to meet the requirements of Section 504. Additionally,

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

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.

Bullying and Harassment

COVID-19 is not at all connected to race, ethnicity, or nationality. School staff should be mindful that bullying, intimidation, or harassment of students based on actual or perceived race, color, national origin, or disability (including the actual disability of being infected with COVID-19 or perception of being infected) may result in a violation of state and federal civil rights laws. School divisions must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate what occurred when responding to reports of bullying or harassment. If parents and families believe their child has experienced bullying, harassment, or intimidation related to the COVID-19 outbreak, they should contact the school principal or division superintendent. Parents can help their child prevent [COVID-19 related stigma and racism](#).

Testing

Federal and State Testing

The VDOE is working diligently to seek any waivers necessary to waive state and federal testing requirements. More information will be available in the near future and posted on the VDOE's [COVID-19 and Virginia Public Schools webpage](#).

SAT Testing

- The College Board is canceling the May 2, 2020, SAT administration. Makeup exams for the March 14 administration (scheduled March 28) are also canceled.
- Registered students will receive refunds.
- The College Board will provide future additional SAT testing opportunities for students as soon as feasible, in place of canceled administrations.

For more information, please visit the [College Board websitecollegeboard.org](#).

ACT Testing

- ACT has rescheduled the April 4, 2020, national ACT test date to June 13, 2020, in response to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19.
- ACT will communicate directly with all students currently registered for the April 4, 2020, ACT test.
- All students registered for the April 4 test date will receive an email from ACT in the next few days informing them of the postponement and instructions for next steps.

For additional information please visit the [ACT website](#).

AP Testing

The College Board provided information on March 20 that begins to outline an alternative plan for AP testing review and administration.

COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School-Aged Children

- The College Board is providing [free remote learning resources](#) to students by AP teachers beginning on Wednesday, March 25, 2020.
- Traditional face-to-face exam administrations will not take place. Students will take a 45-minute online free-response exam at home that will only include topics and skills that most AP teachers and students covered by early March.
- Students will be able to take these streamlined exams on any device they have access to—computer, tablet, or smartphone. Taking a photo of handwritten work will also be an option.
- Colleges support this solution and are committed to ensuring that AP students receive the credit they have worked this year to earn. For decades, colleges have accepted a shortened AP Exam for college credit when groups of students have experienced emergencies.
- We'll continue to support students with free resources through exam day. While we encourage students to wait until closer to the test date to decide, **any student already registered for an exam can choose to cancel at no charge.**
- The College Board recognizes that the digital divide could prevent some low-income and rural students from participating. Working with partners, they will invest so that these students have the tools and connectivity they need to review AP content online and take the exam. If your students need mobile tools or connectivity, you can [reach out to them directly to let them know.](#)
- The full exam schedule, specific free-response question types that will be on each AP Exam, and additional testing details will be available by April 3.

For more information, please visit the [AP Updates for Schools Impacted by Coronavirus](#) webpage.

More Information

The best place to find accurate, up-to-date information is the [VDH COVID-19 website](#). The VDOE provides additional information and resources on [VDOE COVID-19 Resources](#).

The Virginia Department of Health has also established a call center to address questions from the public about COVID-19. The Virginia Department of Health has also activated a public information line, 877-ASK-VDH3, for questions from residents about COVID-19 can be emailed to respiratory@vdh.virginia.gov.