



ARLINGTON  
VIRGINIA



LOUDOUN  
COUNTY  
VIRGINIA

Health  
Department



**TO:** School Superintendents

**FROM:** Northern Virginia Health Directors

**DATE:** July 23, 2021

**RE:** Interim Recommendations for School Reopening starting 25 July 2021

On July 21, 2021, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) published recommendations for COVID-19 prevention in Virginia's pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade schools. These recommendations are available online at [www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf) and are consistent with those of the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.aap.org) (AAP).

These new recommendations are focused on how schools can best provide in-person learning in a setting of ongoing community spread of COVID-19 and include a layered prevention strategy that includes:

- Promoting vaccination
- Consistent and correct use of masks
- Physical distancing
- Screening testing
- Ventilation
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities
- Staying home when sick and getting tested
- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine.

The five Northern Virginia Health Departments support 1) K-12 in-person learning AND 2) maximizing a layered approach to COVID exposure mitigation strategies.

Specifically, with regard to masking, we fully support the VDH and DOE guidelines for indoor mask use by any student or staff member who is not fully vaccinated in all schools and universal masking (i.e. regardless of vaccination status) for all students and staff in elementary schools.

We strongly recommend that middle schools and high schools consider universal masking for the following situations that fall under the CDC recommendation that is included in the VDH and DOE guidelines:

- Increasing or substantial or high COVID-19 transmission within the school or surrounding community.
- Increasing community transmission of a variant that is spread more easily among children and adolescents or is resulting in more severe illness from COVID-19 among children and adolescents.
- Lacking a system to monitor the vaccine status of students and/or teachers and staff.
- Difficulty monitoring or enforcing mask policies that are not universal. as safe as possible for everyone involved.

We know ideally students learn best in person. Our recommendations should help your school systems reduce the number of students excluded due to exposures to COVID-19 given our shared priority for in-person learning. As your school systems prepare to welcome students back to the classroom, we will continue to evaluate new information on COVID-19 to adjust our recommendations as needed to ensure your students continue to thrive with in-person learning and continue to be of service to you in our shared goal of minimizing disruption to our children's education.

Sincerely,

Anne Gaddy, MD, MPH  
Acting Director, Alexandria Health Department

Reuben K. Varghese, MD, MPH  
Director, Arlington Health District

Gloria Addo-Ayensu, MD, MPH  
Director, Fairfax County Health Department

David Goodfriend, MD, MPH  
Director, Loudoun County Health Department

Alison Ansher, MD, MPH  
Director, Prince William Health District