

Highland County Public Schools Phase III Health Mitigation Plan

Guidance for Virginia Public and Private preK-12 Schools Submitting COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plans

Per an order from 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 Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). This document provides guidance for schools and school divisions in developing and submitting such plans.

Eligibility:

The public health order applies to any private or public school operating in the Commonwealth. Public school divisions may submit one single form; private schools must submit individually.

Residential and boarding schools should reference the *Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidance* for additional information on mitigation strategies for residential schools for components that are unique to those settings (e.g. residence halls, communal dining, housing for isolation/quarantine, health services, etc).

Those schools which have been previously issued a variance to operate by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, may continue to operate under the terms of such variance. They have until July 15, 2020 to submit a plan to VDOE under this order for those existing programs. They must also submit plans for expansion of program offerings under the Phase II or Phase III guidance.

If schools begin offering programs in Phase II, they must submit their plan before opening in Phase II. If schools do not offer programs in Phase II but reopen in Phase III, they must submit before opening in Phase III.

Logistics:

Plans must be posted online and submitted to the VDOE before schools reopen under the Phase II or Phase III guidance. The plan will be submitted to the Virginia Department of Education via an online form. [Public school divisions should submit Phase II plans online here](#); [Private schools should submit Phase II plans online here](#).

Key Elements of School Plans:

Referencing [CDC guidance](#) and the *Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools*, schools must prepare COVID-19 mitigation plans for reopening as even in Phases II and III of the Forward Virginia Blueprint, it is likely that outbreaks of COVID-19 will continue. Therefore, the plans outlined in this section should consider various contingencies for continuing operations in the event of an outbreak. Schools must report cases and outbreaks to their local health department, and consult with their respective local health department regarding management of outbreaks, dismissals or similar decisions such as a shutdown of school activities.

Guiding Principles

The more people a student or staff member interacts with, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. The risk of COVID-19 spread increases in school settings as follows:

- **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.

Strategies that will assist in successful planning should center around promoting behaviors that reduce spread of COVID-19, maintaining healthy environments and operations and, preparing for and acting when someone gets sick and/or presents with symptoms.

At a minimum, plans must address the following considerations:

1) Planning to reopen

- a. Establish a COVID-19 team within the school division and a point person at each school facility.

The Highland COVID-19 division team consists of: Dr. Thomas Schott, Superintendent; Teresa Blum, Elementary Principal; Tim Good, High School Principal; and Mike Warf, Athletic Director.

School Based point persons will consist of the building principal or principal's designee

- b. Know the contact information and procedures for reaching the local health department.

Highland County Public Schools has been in regular contact with our local health department officials, including Natasha Bowers 540-468-2270, Amanda McComas 540-290-3005, Dr. Laura Kornegay 540-332-7830 ext. 341

- c. Plan for health and absenteeism monitoring/approaches.

Highland Schools will monitor student absenteeism using already established attendance procedures. Should the rate of absenteeism increase in any school or across the division, then the Superintendent will be made aware of this by the building principals and will consult with the local health department regarding possible causes and next steps.

Highland County Public Schools has placed the following protocol in place to monitor employee health and absenteeism:

- *Survey all employees to identify any individual who reports that they have circumstances that will impede their return to on-site work upon reopening.*
 - *Communicate with all individuals who respond affirmatively to determine the nature of their risk factors or barriers to return.*
 - *Provide accommodations, modifications, supports, and/or alternatives to on-site work as determined appropriate per their individual needs. (options will include: telework, modified job duties, and virtual instructional opportunities.*
- *Highland County Public Schools will provide during training guidance to all employees related to recommended health and safety precautions to take before and during work, expectations for health and safety while at work, to include appropriate use of PPE, and engagement with visitors and the public.*
- *Highland County Public Schools will require employees to complete a health screening protocol before reporting to work each day. The results of the individual health screen will be reviewed and documented by the employee's immediate supervisor.*

- d. Develop a communications strategy that includes:
 - i. Orientation and training for staff and students specific to new COVID-19 mitigation strategies;
 - ii. Plans for communication with staff, parents, and students of new policies;
 - iii. Plans for how to communicate an outbreak or positive cases detected at the school.

As part of the completion of the COVID-19 Mitigation Health Plan, a Health Procedures document will be developed. This document will serve as the foundation for all communication regarding health mitigation strategies for employees, students, and parents. Training will be provided to staff upon return to school during teacher work weeks. The documents will be distributed to students and parents prior to the students return and then training will occur for students once they return to school physically (Phase III). Distribution will occur through several communication platforms including School System/School Websites, Social Media Platforms, local media.

There will also be a series of meetings, both virtual and in person, that will allow for community feedback. Finally, we will follow standard procedures to notify families of an outbreak and a subsequent school closure through our blackboard all call system.

- e. Participate in community response efforts
Highland County Public Schools will coordinate with local agencies and organizations to include DSS, Highland Medical Center, the VDH, Highland County Sheriff's Office, the Highland Board of Supervisors, local civic organizations, and local churches in the community response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- f. Prepare your division's student health services:
Highland County Public Schools has reviewed all current health policies and procedures to ensure alignment with CDC, VDH, and VDOE guidelines, as well as recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- g. Assure provision of medical-grade PPE for health services staff;

Medical Grade PPE will be provided to the necessary personnel. The medical grade PPE will be stored in Central office.

- h. Assure and maintain typical (non-COVID-19) health services;

Highland County Public Schools will continue all typical health services as usual. To prevent exposure to students who may be sick, medications and first aid will be delivered in a separate space from where sick children will be attended to. Lay staff trained by EMTs will be designated to assist should a sick child require isolation to prevent the

potential spread of COVID-19. Individual healthcare plans will address COVID-19 for students with health needs.

- i. For the provision of mental health services.

Highland County Public Schools will have trained staff available by phone or in person to any student, family or staff member that requires assistance. Referrals to local mental health services will continue as normal, including accessing emergency services through the local Community Services Board and FAPT-funded services.

2) Promoting Behaviors That Reduce Spread of COVID-19

- a. Create an education/training plan for staff, students and families. Consider COVID-19 prevention education (hand washing, staying home if ill, etc.). Education should be part of staff and student orientations and to be sent to all parties before reopening schools and include:

- i. Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,
- ii. Use of cloth face coverings,
- iii. Staying home when sick,
- iv. Encouraging physical distancing.

Highland County Public Schools will provide training for all staff and students on personal hygiene practices that prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as hand washing and covering coughs. This training will be completed by division level personnel for all staff, and by classroom teachers for all students - through distance training before they return to any school facility, as well as immediately upon their physical return to school (Phase III). Cloth face masks will be provided and required among all staff who are physically able to wear them when they cannot maintain social distancing. All staff, students, and stakeholders will be educated on the importance of staying home when sick and maintaining social distancing practices. Lesson plans, modeling and skill-practicing will be used to ensure that staff and students understand and practice these preventative behaviors. Verbal wellness screenings will provide opportunities to counsel individuals on the importance of personal hygiene and specific techniques to stay safe.

- b. Maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene.

Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations will maintain the necessary supplies. The supervisor will work with various vendors to ensure adequate quantities of cleaning and disinfecting products are in stock and available for use in division facilities.

- c. Provide signs and messaging to promote healthy hygiene.

Highland County Public Schools will provide age appropriate signage and material to all facilities to promote healthy hygiene. Materials will be posted in the entrances, hallways,

classrooms, food service areas, restrooms and other areas as deemed appropriate by the building principal or site supervisor.

d. Promote physical distancing

- i. Modify layouts of classrooms, communal areas and buses to ensure social distancing is maintained.

Classrooms will be arranged to ensure six feet of social distancing between students while maximizing available space and ensuring proper entry and egress routes.

The teacher desks will be a minimum of six feet from the student desks in all classrooms.

While students and staff are in the building, communal areas will be monitored to ensure there are no gatherings and social distancing is maintained while people are moving through those spaces.

Highland County Public Schools will maintain social distancing on buses and other transportation vehicles. Buses will assign seating to students utilizing every seat, alternating window and the aisle.

- ii. Develop strategies for food/dining services; these should be consistent with plans to optimize physical distancing.

For students participating in in-person instruction, at the elementary level - meals will be served in the classroom for both breakfast and lunch. At the high school breakfast will be served in the classroom with lunch being served in the cafeteria, maintaining social distancing of 6ft. There will be 5 lunches, to reduce the number of people in the cafeteria.

- iii. Limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing during gatherings.

Outdoor Facilities

- *Must maintain 6ft of physical distance*

Indoor Facilities

- *Must maintain 6ft of physical distance*

- iv. Follow relevant Virginia Phase Guidance[1] for Schools and [CDC guidance](#) for recreational sports for school-related sports and other recreational activities.

Coach/Sponsor Requirement

Once the VHSL has determined when the fall seasons will start:

- *Coaches/Sponsors must provide a detailed Health Plan to their Principal/Designee outlining how they will meet the criteria as indicated in the Highland County Public Schools Plan. The plan must follow guidance as set forth by the CDC and VDH before being allowed to start out of season conditioning.*
- *Scheduled use of the facility must be approved by the Principal or Athletic Director.*

Facilities

Outdoor Activities - Includes Baseball, Softball, Rear Parking Lot and Practice Fields

- *Must maintain 10ft of physical distance*
- *No shared equipment, items must be disinfected between uses/rotations*
- *Individuals should bring their own individual containers for hydration or use disposable cups*

Indoor-Includes Gyms, Weight room, Band/Music,

- *Must maintain 10ft of physical distance*
- *No shared equipment, items must be disinfected between uses/rotations*
- *Individuals should bring their own individual containers for hydration or use disposable cups*

VHSL Physical Requirement

Highland County Public Schools requires all students to have a valid VHSL physical form in order to participate in athletic conditioning and team athletic programs. The physical form must be dated after May 1, 2020 to be valid for the 2020-2021 school year.

Daily Health Screening

All students and staff must answer the county developed screening form before being allowed to participate. Temperatures will be checked for all staff upon entering the building. Any temperature of 100 or above, the staff and students will be sent home.

The screening will consist of the following:

Outside Organizations

During Phase III the use of HCPS facilities by outside organizations will not be allowed.

Use of outside facilities

During Phase III the scheduled use of an outside facility by staff for out of season conditioning will be allowed, with following social distancing guidelines.

Cleaning and Sanitation

Cleaning supplies will be provided to staff to insure equipment is cleaned after each use.

Routine cleaning by custodians will be scheduled to occur each day for frequently touched surfaces and high volume areas.

Meals

No meals are provided during athletics.

3) Maintaining Healthy Environments

a. Plan for daily health screening questions of staff and students.

Highland County Public Schools will provide a screening tool to parents, students, and staff for a home health assessment prior to staff and students reporting to school. The division will utilize the county developed screening form from the VDH as a guideline for the staff screening questions. Staff and students, or student's parents where age appropriate, should assess themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 before reporting to school. Students will also be screened in their first period/homeroom upon arrival to school. The screening will consist of the following:

Answer Yes or No since my last day in the building, Have I had any of the following:

- *A new fever (100 or higher) or a sense of having a fever?*
- *A new cough*
- *New shortness of breath*
- *New chills*
- *A new sore throat*

If an individual answer YES to any of the screening questions before arriving, they should stay home and not enter the building.

Temperatures will be checked for all staff upon entering the building. Any temperature of 100 or above, the staff will be sent home. Students will have their temperatures checked in the morning before entering the school. Any student with a temperature of 100 or above will be sent home. In the elementary school temperatures will be checked again at lunch time.

b.

Hygiene Practices:

- i. Create cleaning and disinfection protocols that include frequently touched surfaces; transport vehicles; schedules for increased cleaning, routine cleaning, and disinfection; ensuring adequate cleaning supplies and correct use/storage.

Frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and sprayed with an approved disinfectant. Food service areas will be sanitized utilizing solutions that are approved for use in those areas.

- *Door handles, sinks, toilet handles, etc. will be cleaned with a sanitizing solution on a regular basis.*
- *Water fountains will be turned off, water will be supplied to the students, or a student may choose to bring their own water bottle.*
- *Areas that are frequently touched by students and non-cafeteria staff in food service areas will be sanitized between each rotation of students. Food will be pulled from the line and the area will be cleaned in accordance with VDH and USDA guidance.*
- *Student Desks:*
 - *Elementary - students will stay at their location and will not change classes/desks. Desk will be cleaned daily after use.*
 - *Secondary - students will transfer classes. Desk will be sanitized between classes as students' transition.*
- *Transportation: the transportation department will sanitize student areas between each run and daily at the conclusion of the last run. Driver areas will be sanitized daily at the conclusion of the last run.*
- *Principals will develop cleaning schedules for routine cleaning as appropriate for their buildings. The routine cleaning schedule will be fluid and adjustable to meet the needs as circumstances change. Routine cleaning will include disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and high volume areas nightly.*
- *Building level custodians will notify their building administrators of necessary cleaning and sanitizing supplies. The school administrator will requisition supplies from Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations.*

- *Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations will ensure building level administrators, custodians, and transportation specialists are trained in the proper usage and storage of cleaning and sanitizing supplies.*

ii. Provide additional hand sanitizer/handwashing stations.

Hand Sanitizing stations will be located at entrances to the buildings, outside of restrooms, and food service locations.

iii. Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing to the extent possible (e.g. dedicated student supplies, lab equipment, computers, etc).

Building administrators will provide division staff a list of needed supplies in order to ensure one-item-per-student. The division staff will evaluate the need for manipulatives, early childhood items, and technology/devices and purchase items to fulfill the identified needs.

c. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible.

All windows in the school are operational. Fans will be supplied to the staff.

d. Ensure that water systems and features are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.

Water systems in all facilities will be flushed prior to re-occupying the buildings.

4) Maintaining Healthy Operations

a. Implement protections for staff and children at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

All students with health needs will have these risk factors addressed as part of their Individualized Health Plan. Safety practices, such as personal hygiene and social distancing, will be implemented for their protection. Screening practices and provision of masks, as well as altered sick leave, will be made available to all staff. Virtual learning options will be made available for students and staff who feel that option provides a better alternative for their health needs.

b. Align plans for gatherings, field trips and volunteer restrictions consistent with any Executive Order in place.

- *Classroom occupancy for Pre-K through 5 and English Language Learners will maintain six feet social distancing.*
- *Highland County Public Schools will not allow field trips during Phase III.*

- *Volunteers who will be interacting with students will have to complete the COVID-19 screening process on a daily basis. Volunteers will only be allowing in the building to help with math or reading.*

c. Implement sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed. *Highland County Public Schools employees will follow the health and safety protocol for identifying symptoms and risk of possible exposure. This document provides all employees with guidance to determine the need to stay home, self-isolate, and/or to communicate with their physicians to seek medical direction or assistance.*

Highland County Public Schools will provide information to all employees outlining additional sick leave benefits and extended FMLA benefits corresponding to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Highland County Public Schools will provide additional information to further expand awareness and to educate employees regarding their rights associated with this Act.

Students will be required to stay home for 72 hours after a fever has subsided without using fever-reducing medications. They will not be allowed to participate in school-based activities or remain in contact with others if they display symptoms of respiratory illness or any COVID-19 symptoms. These symptoms will include:

- *Fever over 100*
- *Cough*
- *Shortness of breath*
- *Fatigue*
- *Muscle or body aches*
- *New loss of smell or taste*
- *Sore throat*
- *Congestion or runny nose*
- *Nausea or vomiting*
- *Diarrhea*

d. Train back-up staff to ensure continuity of operations.

Highland County Public Schools is broadly recruiting substitute employees to increase the availability of staff to ensure continuity of operations across departments. All current and newly hired substitutes will be provided with targeted professional development to ensure that they are prepared to seamlessly transition into their role as a substitute employee. Additionally, Highland County Public Schools is including all Instructional Assistants in professional development activities planned for Teachers so that they may transition into those roles in a substitute capacity as necessary.

5) Protecting vulnerable individuals (e.g. 65+, underlying health conditions):

- a. Create policy options to support those at higher risk for severe illness to limit their exposure risk (e.g. telework, modified job duties, virtual learning opportunities).

Highland County Public Schools will survey all employees to identify any individual who reports that they have circumstances that will impede their return to on-site work upon reopening.

The Highland County Public Schools Human Resources Department will communicate with all individuals who respond affirmatively to determine the nature of their risk factors or barriers to return and provide accommodations, modifications, supports, and/or alternatives to on-site work as determined appropriate per their individual needs. (options will include: telework, modified job duties, and virtual instructional opportunities.

Highland County Public Schools has developed an Employee Work Guidance document to provide guidance to all employees related to recommended health and safety precautions to take before and during work, expectations for health and safety while at work, to include appropriate use of PPE, and engagement with visitors and the public.

Highland County Public Schools will require employees to complete a health screening protocol before reporting to work each day. The results of the individual health screen will be reviewed and documented by the employee's immediate supervisor.

- b. Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices that enable faculty, staff and students to stay home or self-isolate when they are sick or have been exposed.

All Highland County Public Schools employees will follow the health and safety protocol outlined in the Employee Return to Work Guidance document, to include protocol for identifying symptoms and risk of possible exposure. This document provides all employees with guidance to determine the need to stay home, self-isolate, and/or to communicate with their physicians to seek medical direction or assistance.

Highland County Public Schools has provided information to all employees outlining additional sick leave benefits and extended FMLA benefits corresponding to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. HCPS will provide additional information to further expand awareness and to educate employees regarding their rights associated with this Act.

- c. Develop policies for return to class/work after COVID-19 illness.

Employees who have tested positive and have had COVID-19 may return to work when they meet ALL of the following criteria and have coordinated their return to work with their immediate supervisor:

- *You have had no fever for 72 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers), and*
- *Other symptoms have improved for 72 hours without the use of medication (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), and*
- *It has been at least 14 days since symptoms first appeared.*
- *You received two negative tests in a row, 24 hours apart, OR Your healthcare provider has provided written confirmation that you may return to work.*

Students who have tested positive and have had COVID-19 may return to school activities when they meet ALL of the following criteria:

- *You have had no fever for 72 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers), and*
- *Other symptoms have improved for 72 hours without the use of medication (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), and*
- *It has been at least 14 days since symptoms first appeared.*
- *You received two negative tests in a row, 24 hours apart, OR Your healthcare provider has provided written confirmation that you may return to school.*

6) Preparing for When Someone Gets Sick

a. Separate and isolate those who present with symptoms.

Each building will have a dedicated space for students who present with symptoms of COVID-19 that is separate from areas that may be used regularly. This area will not be used for any other purpose at any time and will be disinfected after use. Staff who assess or care for sick children will be provided with PPE that include masks and gloves.

b. Facilitate safe transportation of those who are sick to home or healthcare facility. *Parents will be responsible for picking up sick children. Parents will provide school administration with several emergency contacts who can pick up the student if they are unavailable or who can reach the parent in the event of illness. Should a student present respiratory distress or medical symptoms that require acute care, emergency services will be notified to transport the child to the hospital.*

c. Implement cleansing and disinfection procedures of areas used by sick individuals.

When an individual becomes sick or presents with symptoms of COVID-19, maintenance staff will be notified immediately. All areas that the individual has come in contact with will be disinfected using EPA-registered disinfectants applied by trained staff.

- d. Develop a communications plan with local health department to initiate public health investigation, contact tracing and consultation on next steps.

Highland County Public Schools will contact a person at VDH Central Virginia Health District. Per Central Virginia Health District, all suspected cases of COVID-19 should contact their family physician by phone to determine next steps and testing. School staff will be able and willing to facilitate this contact should a parent need assistance.

7) Planning to close down if necessary, due to severe conditions.

- a. Determine which conditions will trigger a reduction in in-person classes. *Should the community transmission rate increase, Highland County Public Schools will collaborate with community partners, including the Central Virginia Health District, to limit in-person activities and transition students to virtual learning. Highland County Public Schools will stay in compliance with all CDC guidelines and consult with VDOE and VDH as needed.*

- b. Determine which conditions will trigger complete school closure. *Highland County Public Schools will be closed for 14 days, once a confirmed case is identified for either a student Or family member of a student, a staff member or a family member of a staff member whom either attend or work at Highland County Public Schools. . The schools will be closed, but education will continue through tele-communications.*

8) Overnight boarding schools should consult *the Virginia Higher Education Reopening Guidelines* and [guidelines for Congregate Settings](#) for additional information and recommendations.

Not Applicable