



**#081-22**

**Commonwealth of Virginia**  
**Virginia Department of Education**  
Superintendent's Memo #081-22

DATE: April 8, 2022  
TO: Division Superintendents  
FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
SUBJECT: **Updated Health Guidance for K-12 Public Schools**

As current COVID-19 infections decline and vaccinations and natural immunity increase within the general population, Virginia is on a path toward normalcy. This guidance on health mitigation strategies is for K-12 schools and preschool programs within K-12 schools. This document supersedes all previous guidance issued by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) or the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

Neither guidance nor recommendations are mandatory. K-12 schools may practice multiple prevention strategies and should remain vigilant about changing conditions. The benefit of mitigation efforts must always be weighed against the cost to students' overall well-being. Here are key prevention strategies that K-12 schools in Virginia should consider to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

1. Vaccinations
  - a. All staff are encouraged to get vaccinated. Employers should facilitate employees getting vaccinated.
  - b. Parents should determine whether or not to vaccinate their children.

2. Staying home when sick
  - a. Instruct any children, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as influenza (flu) or COVID-19, to stay home and seek advice on testing and treatment from their physician.
  - b. If a child becomes sick while in care, arrange for the child to be picked up, while the child waits in a separate isolation room/area.
  
3. Face masks for staff
  - a. As it relates to staff, providers should refer to the [Virginia Department of Labor and Industry \(DOLI\) standards and updates](#). Note that [updated guidance encourages employers to permit workers and customers the choice of whether to wear a mask](#), except as otherwise required by their employer or VOSH pursuant to Va. Code § [40.1-51.1.A](#).
  
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations
  - a. [Updated CDC recommendations](#) provide insight about community levels, quarantine and isolation, and use of face masks.
  
5. Face masks on school buses
  - a. It is no longer a requirement that students wear face masks on buses or vans operated by public or private school systems.

In addition to the above guidance, there have been two recent executive and legislative actions related to masking that do have the effect of law. On January 15, 2022, Governor Youngkin issued [Executive Order Number Two \(2022\) and Order of Public Health Emergency One](#) that rescinded a previous executive order and health order requiring masking of children in public and private school settings.

On February 16, 2022, Governor Youngkin signed into law [Senate Bill 739](#) which provides parents of a student in a public elementary or secondary school, or in any school-based early childhood care and education program the right to opt-out of local school mask mandates on school property. The law also indicates that families do NOT have to provide a reason for opting out and students may NOT face consequences for not wearing masks. All school divisions in Virginia must have complied with these provisions by March 1, 2022.

While guidance and recommendations are not mandatory, abiding by the law (executive orders and SB739) is mandatory. Thus, K-12 schools should follow the updated VDH guidance AND provide parents the right to opt children out of mask mandates.

This guidance for K-12 schools in Virginia supersedes other guidance. The guidance document updated on February 11, 2022 is rescinded and will remain as an archived resource.

### For more information

For more information on SB739 and Executive Order Number Two (2020), please contact the Office of Policy at [policy@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:policy@doe.virginia.gov) or (804)225-2092.

JB/LMS