



## Virgin Islands Re-opening Schools Guidance 2020-2021

*Upon the re-opening of school buildings, all procedures and guidelines provided must be followed. This guidance relies heavily on the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and provide clear steps for students and staff who are returning for the 2020-2021 school year. The Virgin Islands Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Health has developed guidance and strategies to safely support the reopening of schools. Due to the unpredictability of COVID-19, this document will be reviewed and periodically updated as appropriate.*

*Schools will be prepared to move between 3 phases based on the escalation or de-escalation of the COVID-19 virus:*

Phase **Green:** 100% Classroom face to face instruction

Phase **Yellow:** Combination (Hybrid) of virtual and face to face classroom instruction

Phase **Red:** 100% Virtual instruction

### **BEFORE ANY SCHOOL CAN OPEN:**

- Ensure the school buildings/facilities are appropriately cleaned and sanitized.
- Ensure all school bathrooms are fully functional.
- Flush the water system at each facility by running the water for five minutes at each facility.
- Establish a plan for the frequency of cleaning (surfaces, rooms) and allowable forms of disinfectants.
- Establish a plan for temperature check of all persons entering the facility/building.
- Establish a social distancing plan that allows for 6ft of spacing between each person.
- Establish a protocol for student pick up/drop off.
- Outlined a protocol/plan for how a sick staff or student will be managed.
- Identified a space in each building for isolating staff or students who present with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Educate nurses on what to look for, and what classifies a student as a person under investigation (PUI).
- Educate staff, teachers, and faculty on how to monitor symptoms (recognize when a student should be pulled from class and sent to the nurse). Nurses should be consistently reeducated.
- All staff, (including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, cleaning and maintenance personnel) must be trained on personal protection, safety measures, and COVID related protocols.
- Establish a plan to accommodate needs of children, teachers/staff, and families who are at higher risk for severe illness (vulnerable population).
- Have an available supply of PPE, hand sanitizer, and soap for emergency use.
- Create and post signage that teach and reinforce good hygiene measures such as handwashing, covering coughs, and face coverings.

- Survey at-risk staff members to gauge their intentions in returning to work while maintaining confidentiality consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable federal and territorial privacy laws.
- Survey families with vulnerable children to gauge their intentions in returning to a traditional school setting while maintaining confidentiality consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other applicable federal and territorial privacy laws.

### **MAINTAINING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS**

*Schools will implement the following strategies to maintain a healthy environment.*

#### **Cleaning and Disinfection**

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily and/or between use (playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, etc).
- Use of shared objects (art supplies, toys, games) should be limited when possible, or cleaned between uses.
- Develop a schedule for increased, routine cleaning and disinfection in the evenings or on the weekends.
- Conduct deep cleaning of schools prior to students/staff returning; schedule additional deep cleanings during weekends or school holidays/breaks.
- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products securely away from children.
- Use products that meet EPA disinfection criteria.
- Cleaning products should not be used near children, and staff should ensure that there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic fumes.
- Close off areas used by a sick person and do not use these areas until after cleaning and disinfecting.

### **MASK/FACE COVERING GUIDELINES**

- Masks are required for all employees and students while on school premises.
- Masks are required for all bus drivers and students.
- Parents are expected to provide their children with masks each day.
- A limited number of masks will be maintained in the nurse's office for emergencies only.
- Recommendations regarding face coverings should be provided to staff, students, and families on proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings.
- Any policy regarding face coverings will be sensitive to the needs of students and staff with medical issues that make the wearing of a face covering inadvisable.

### **BUS TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES**

*For bus transit operators, potential sources of exposure include having close contact with a bus passenger with COVID-19, by contacting surfaces touched or handled by a person with COVID 19, or by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes. For safety:*

- Limit close contact with others by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible.
- Students will avoid standing or sitting within 6 feet of the bus driver.

- Avoid touching surfaces often touched by bus passengers.
- Use gloves if required to touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids.
- Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, including surfaces in the driver cockpit commonly touched by the operator.
- Bus drivers are required to wear face masks.
- Children must maintain 6-ft of distance between each other while traveling in school buses.
- Children from the same household may be allowed to share seating bench on the bus.
- Students and bus drivers should be screened for symptoms of illness.
- Loading/unloading protocol at bus stops should be implemented.
- Buses are to be sanitized after each use.
- Parents are encouraged to transport their children to/from school.

**IF A STAFF / STUDENT DEVELOPS SYMPTOMS SUGGESTIVE OF COVID-19:**

- School personnel and students who are sick are encouraged to stay home.
- Staff and students who present with COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath) at school will be immediately separated from others.
- School administrators will notify Department of Health officials immediately of any case of COVID-19.
- Inform those who have had close contact to a person suspected of COVID-19 to stay home and follow Department of Health (DOH) guidance if symptoms develop. If a person does not have symptoms, he/she is also required to follow appropriate guidance from DOH for home quarantine until cleared.
- Advise sick staff members and children not to return to the school facility/building until they have met the criteria to discontinue home isolation (quarantine).
- Call the DOH Epidemiology hotline **340-712-6299** or **340-776-1519** to arrange for testing and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Those who become sick at school will have their temperature taken:
  - Temperature will be taken before entering school buildings or facilities.
  - Students/Staff will be isolated and sent home if reading is 100.4°F (38°C) or above.
  - Confidentiality of student/staff is to be maintained.
  - If the child is in any kind of distress, 911 will be notified immediately.
- If a student is determined to be a person under investigation (PUI), the COVID hotline should be called (before the student leaves the campus). The student will not be able to return to school without a note from the Department of Health, or a negative COVID test result.
- Nurses caring for children suspected of COVID-19 exposure should immediately report their suspicion to the Department of Health.
- Schools will participate in contact tracing efforts and specimen collection efforts as directed by local health officials.

**PROTECTING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

- Provide remote/distance learning opportunities for vulnerable student populations in consultation with parents and public health officials.

- Consult with school officials to offer special accommodations (such as an alternative teaching assignment) for students or personnel who are members of vulnerable populations.
- Adhere to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requirements.
- Adhere to local and federal employment law and COVID-19 extended leave allowances.
- Frequently consult with parents of children who require additional support (to ensure the delivery of quality services).
- Offer the Employee Assistance Program to all staff members.

### **HYGIENE AND WELLNESS GUIDANCE**

- Proper hand hygiene is an important infection control measure. Each person is required to wash his/her hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be utilized.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Hand soap versus hand sanitizer should be used for younger children.
- Clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces and shared objects after each use.
- Hand washing and sanitization are encouraged throughout the day.
- Key times to clean hands in general include:
  - Before, during, and after preparing food
  - Before eating food
  - After using the bathroom
  - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Provide paper towels and no touch trash cans in all bathrooms, classrooms and frequently trafficked areas.
- Schools will take steps to ensure all water systems are safe at all times.
- Allow students and staff to bring hand sanitizer from home.
- Use gloves if required to touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids.

### **STUDENT MEAL GUIDANCE**

- Lunch will be served and eaten in the classrooms (can be cafeteria prepared).
- Students should be allowed to bring personal lunch/snacks from home.
- Students are required to wash hands before and after meal service.
- Students should use disposable plates, utensils, cups, etc.
- Water fountains should be turned off. Bottled water will be provided, or students and staff can bring water from home for personal use.
- Cafeterias and high-touch surfaces should be cleaned multiple times throughout the school day.

### **TRANSITIONING**

- If it is not possible to suspend use of common areas, it is encouraged that schools limit the extent to which students mix with each other, and particularly with students from other classes.
  - Provide additional time for transitions.

- Designate areas of the hallway (i.e. lanes) as flow paths to keep students separated and to minimize congregation of students.
- Stagger classes (ex: by odd/even room numbers, grade/ discipline) changes to decrease number of students in hallways at one time.
- Have the same group of students stay with the same staff (all day for young children and as much as feasible for older children).
- 6-ft spacing should be marked (ex. floor decals) throughout each school facility/building.
- Designated entrance and exit flow paths should be established in each building/facility.
- Restrict hallway use. Try to avoid taking multiple classes to bathrooms at once (e.g., avoid having all classes use the bathroom right after lunch or recess).
- Each school should have an identified entrance for students and a separate entrance for staff.
- The congregation of students in common areas is discouraged.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH SIGNAGE**

- Schools are to post CDC designed signage in classrooms, hallways, and entrances to reinforce healthy hygiene and expected school and workplace behaviors.
- Signage should capture COVID-19 symptoms, preventative measures (including staying home when sick), good hygiene, and school specific protocols.
- Messaging should be disseminated in English and Spanish.

### **PRACTICING PREVENTION GUIDELINES**

#### **Classroom**

- Increase the space between desks. Rearrange student desks to maximize the space between students. Desks must be at least 6-ft apart.
- Turn desks to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).
- Establish distance between the teacher's desk/board and the student's desk.
- Schools will modify classes where students are likely to be in very close contact. For example, teachers may rotate to classrooms to prevent classes mixing with others.
- To avoid mixing of students and increased exposure, students will eat lunch and breakfast in their classrooms.
- Eliminate the sharing of books, scissors, and other educational material.
- Send a few students into the library to pick out books rather than going as a class.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, as long as this does not pose a safety or health risk to students or staff.

### **Visitors and Volunteers**

- Establish a protocol for visitors such as: calling the front office before entering the building, screening, and hand washing.
- Limit the presence of volunteers in classrooms, cafeteria, and other activities.
- Non-essential visitors and volunteers will be restricted in school buildings/facilities.
- Sanitizer or hand washing stations must be in place at every entrance, exit, classroom, etc. and an adequate supply of cleansers and disinfectants at each school.

### **Group Gatherings**

- Schools are to avoid field trips, assemblies, and other large gatherings such as athletic events or practices, and special performances.
- Abide by the number of persons allowed to congregate in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order.
- In elementary school settings, consider staggering playground use rather than allowing multiple classes to play together.
- Limit other activities where multiple classes interact.

### **Communication**

- Disseminate COVID-19 related information to staff, students and parents through multiple channels (social media, newsletters, video, etc.)
- Communicate clearly and frequently.
- Utilize a reliable source to ensure information is accurate and up to date.

### **Support Teaching and Learning**

- Secure partners and resources to effectively respond to the academic needs of students.
- Recognize that COVID-19 may impact each student differently.
- Invest in social emotional wellness, and tools to navigate differences across culture and accessibility.

###