



Office of Student Services | 2110 Washington Boulevard • Arlington, VA 22204

Date: April 19, 2024  
From: Dr. Darrell Sampson, Executive Director, Office of Student Services  
Dr. Robin Wallin, Coordinator, School Health Services  
Through: Dr. Julie Crawford, Chief of DEI & Student Support  
Re: Updates to Respiratory Illness Guidance

### **Updated Viral Respiratory Illness Guidance for Families**

On March 1, 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance for how people can protect themselves and their communities from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, influenza (“flu”) and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). [here](#).

### **APS Illness Guidelines: When Should Your Child Stay Home from School?**

Many illnesses do not require exclusion and we want our students to be at school as much as possible. However, children may be excluded if they have an illness that prevents them from participating comfortably in school activities or if there is a risk of spreading contagious disease to others.

Please keep your student home if they have any of the following illness symptoms:

- **Fever:** A student with a temperature of 100.4°F or greater. The student should not return until 24 hours of no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Diarrhea:** The student should have no loose stools for 24 hours prior to returning to school.
- **Vomiting:** The student should have no vomiting episodes for 24 hours prior to returning.
- **Certain communicable diseases:** Students and staff diagnosed with certain communicable diseases may have to be excluded for a certain period. Contact your School Nurse for more information.

**Families should promptly inform their school’s attendance office and school nurse if their child is diagnosed with or tests positive for COVID-19, flu, RSV, or other infectious illnesses.**

Students who have symptoms of respiratory illness (COVID-19, flu, RSV) can go back to their normal activities and return to school when, **for at least 24 hours, BOTH of the following are true:**

- Their symptoms are getting better overall (see illness guidelines above) **AND**
- They have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication).

When returning to school and normal activities, students should take added precautions over the next 5 days, such as:

- Taking additional steps for cleaner air; this includes schools ensuring that classroom Certified Air Cleaning Devices (CACDs) are used daily, and filters changed on portable and HVAC systems as recommended.
- [Practicing good hygiene](#); this includes encouraging regular hand washing with soap and water and providing/using alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- [Wearing a well-fitting mask](#);

- Keeping [physical distancing from others](#); and
- Getting tested ([see CDC guidance on testing and respiratory viruses here](#)).

**Keep in mind that students may still be able to spread the virus that made them sick, even if they are feeling better.**

Students who develop a fever or start to feel *worse* after they have gone back to school should stay home again until, for at least 24 hours, **BOTH of the following are true**:

- Their symptoms are getting better overall, **AND**
- They have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen).
- After that, take added precautions such as those described above for the next 5 days.

**If a student never had symptoms but tested positive** for a respiratory virus, such as COVID 19, flu, or RSV, they do not have to stay home, but parent/guardian **should inform their school’s attendance office and school nurse of the positive test result, AND take added precautions for the 5 days after the positive test such as:**

- Taking additional [steps for cleaner air](#); this includes schools ensuring that classroom Certified Air Cleaning Devices (CACDs) are used daily, and filters changed on portable and HVAC systems as recommended.
- [Practicing good hygiene](#); this includes encouraging regular hand washing with soap and water and providing/using alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- [Wearing a well-fitting mask](#); and
- [Keeping physical distancing from others](#)

Students who never had symptoms but test positive for a respiratory virus may still be contagious. Details regarding CDC’s updated guidance to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses when you are sick can be found [here](#). Please refer any questions to your student’s school nurse.

### **Respiratory Virus Protocols for School Year 2024-25**

#### **Masking**

Masks remain optional. The CDC provides information about masks and their benefits in the prevention of spreading respiratory infections [here](#) so that staff and families can make the best decisions for themselves. APS strongly recommends the use of masks, in line with CDC guidance, under these circumstances:

- A student becomes symptomatic in the school setting.
- For 5 days after an absence due to respiratory illness.
- For 5 days after testing positive for a respiratory illness without any symptoms.
- When recently exposed to a respiratory virus; or
- When respiratory viruses are causing a lot of illness in your school or local community.

Schools will make available surgical/disposable masks, free of charge, to any students/staff/visitors who wish to wear one (while supplies last). No one will be required to wear a mask and students who would have difficulty wearing a face covering will not be offered a mask by school or clinic staff.

### **Testing**

It is strongly recommended that individuals experiencing COVID-like illness be tested for COVID-19, flu, or RSV before returning to school. Testing is a prevention strategy that can assist in making decisions to further protect yourself and others. Anyone who has had a fever or vomiting/diarrhea in the past 24 hours must stay home regardless of their test result. There is no requirement to submit documentation of this negative test result. Free rapid antigen COVID-19 test kits can be obtained from school health clinics (while supplies last). [See CDC guidance on testing and respiratory viruses here.](#)

- COVID-like and other respiratory virus symptoms may include:
  - Fever or chills
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headache
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea

### **Vaccination**

All APS staff and students are strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, flu, and RSV (if eligible), including boosters. Proof of vaccination is not required. Arlington County continues to [provide information about vaccine access](#) for those who are interested.

### **Information for those at high risk for COVID-19**

If a student needs to request accommodation due to a medical condition or disability, parents should reach out to the student's IEP team or their school's 504 case manager:

- Learn more about [COVID-19 vaccine recommendations for people who are moderately or severely immunocompromised.](#)
- Learn more about [Risk Factors for Severe Illness from Respiratory Viruses here.](#)

## Layered Prevention Strategies

APS has established practices in place for responding to COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. We remain focused on the health and safety of our students and staff and will continue layered measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious illness in schools, including:

- Providing free rapid antigen COVID-19 test kits in school health clinics (while supplies last).
- Strongly encouraging staff and students to stay up to date on vaccines and boosters, and to take other preventative measures, such as masking and testing when appropriate.
- Notifying the public health authorities of illnesses and sending parent notification emails from the School Health Bureau if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 or other communicable disease in the school.
- Continuing current procedures for cleaning and disinfecting, increased ventilation in schools, offices, buses, and classrooms, and ensuring availability of free face masks.
- Operating portable Certified Air Cleaning Devices (CACDs) including filter changes, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment with MERV-13 filtration.
- Maximizing outside air ventilation for HVAC equipment to the extent possible

## For More Information

- [VDH Respiratory Disease Page](#)
- [CDC Preventing Spread When You're Sick](#)
- [VDH Comparing symptoms of COVID-19, flu, strep, allergies and cold](#)
  - [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), [Spanish](#), [Tagalog](#)
- [VDH COVID-19 Testing Website](#)
- [Care Resource Coordination of Virginia](#)
- VDH COVID-19 hotline at [877-ASK-VDH3 \(877-275-8343\)](tel:877-ASK-VDH3)