



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESPONSE TO COVID-19

MARCH 17, 2020

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COVID-19 IN VIRGINIA

As of today, March 17, there are 50 [presumptive positive cases](#) of COVID-19 in Virginia. Four hundred eighty nine individuals have been tested and two have passed away.

This is a rapidly evolving public health situation but here is what has occurred most recently:

- On March 12, Governor Northam declared a State of Emergency with [Executive Order 51](#).
- On March 13, the Governor ordered the [closure of all public and private K-12 schools](#) from March 16 - 27. This includes preschool classrooms at those schools.
- On March 15, the Governor banned all public meetings of 100 people or more.

COVID-19 AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults.

- While some children and infants have been sick with COVID-19, adults are most of known cases.
- COVID-19 symptoms are similar in children and adults. However, children with confirmed COVID-19 have generally presented with mild symptoms including cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Vomiting and diarrhea have also been reported.
- It's not known yet whether some children may be at higher risk for severe illness, for example, children with underlying medical conditions and special healthcare needs.
- However adults who care for or work closely with children may be vulnerable, especially older adults and adults with underlying illnesses. Based on recent workforce survey results, nearly 1 in 10 child care educators in Virginia are over the age of 60 and a quarter are over the age of 50.
- Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has provided [interim guidance for child care](#).
- Supporting children's coping skills and mental health throughout this time will be critical.

HOME VISITING

Home Visiting will shift to a virtual or telehealth model to the extent feasible for at least two weeks.

- Early Impact Virginia has recommended that all in-person activities be suspended for at least the next two weeks.
- Programs will rely upon their model guidance for adjusted service delivery via phone calls, virtual visits, teleworking
 - This will entail shifting to telehealth visits when "social distancing" is recommended
 - Access to technology can be a barrier for some families, and even programs, and this shift will impact connecting with families.
- Early Impact Virginia has been in communication with VDH and VDSS and both will send additional information to local programs regarding contracting and grant requirements.
- Early Impact Virginia will continue to coordinate with our partners to provide statewide guidance, technical assistance and training as needed.
- For more information, contact Jacque Hale at jhale@earlyimpactva.org

EARLY INTERVENTION

Virginia urge early intervention providers to follow federal guidance from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and consider alternative approaches to ensure continuity of services.

- Guidance may be found at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/qa-covid-19-03-12-2020.pdf>.
- Early Intervention encourages providers to use their judgement regarding providing services and to document their rationale.
- Providers are encouraged to ensure continuity of services, on a case-by-case basis and consistent with protecting health and safety of children.
- Children may receive services at alternative locations or through teleconference or alternative method (e.g., email, video conference).
- Stephanie Waite at Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHS) is the contact for sending questions: Stephanie.waite@dbhds.virginia.gov

CHILD CARE LICENSING

In response to feedback from the field, VDSS Licensing is:

- Monitoring the child care programs that have closed, providing this information to Child Care Aware, so that they can better inform families, especially our first responders and medical professionals, of the programs that are available;
- Reaching out to hospital based child care centers to explore whether they have availability to increase capacity, as the regulation already allows for this. These are established programs, who already have demonstrated health and safety compliance; and
- Exploring regulatory requirements that could potentially be waived, with Governor's approval, such as training and paperwork.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM

The Child Care Subsidy Program will continue to operate.

- Families are encouraged to apply through CommonHelp and to upload their documents through the CommonHelp site.
- The face-to-face meeting for initial eligibility will be temporarily suspended.
- Temporary program modifications are in process to ease burdens on Subsidy families, providers and workers, including full-day authorization for school-age children, increasing paid absence days, enabling sibling enrollment, and modifying manual attendance submission procedures.
- A COVID-19 page with FAQs and ongoing updates is being added to the Virginia Child Care Microsite (www.childcareva.com) and information is available on the VDSS website (www.dss.virginia.gov).
- For more information, contact Sherri Dorsey, Subsidy Program Manager, at sherri.dorsey@dss.virginia.gov.

HEAD START

Head Start is responding to [federal guidance](#) distributed last week that encourages programs to take steps to prevent the introduction and spread of coronavirus.

- Head Start programs in schools are not explicitly included in the Governor's Executive Order but are closed as they generally operate in a school setting.
- Head Starts that operate outside of schools are allowed to remain open but many have closed temporarily. The Office of Head Start (OHS) is advising grantees to consult with local health authorities to make determinations on closures.
- OHS is directing programs to continue to pay wages and provide benefits for staff unable to report to work during closures.
- Programs are also encouraged to engage families and deliver services remotely, to the extent possible.
- Head Start programs may provide meals and snacks to children during closures.
- For more information, please contact Taundwa Jeffries at taundwa.jeffries@dss.virginia.gov

VIRGINIA PRESCHOOL INITIATIVE

All Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) programs in schools are closed for at least two weeks.

- VPI programs in schools are included in the Executive Order and should be closed through March 27 at a minimum.
- Per the Governor's Order, the State Superintendent will work with school divisions to provide flexibility for hours missed. Automated payments will continue and educators should continue to be compensated and continue with all benefits.
- VPI programs that operate outside of schools are allowed to remain open but some have closed temporarily. Licensed programs should continue to follow guidance provided by DSS.
- VPI Programs have been encouraged to engage families and share resources such as book and activities with families. The VDOE is currently gathering a set of resources that can be used to support ongoing learning for preschool children and will share online.
- VDOE has extensive resources on its [website](#) and has produced early childhood FAQs that will be shared via email lists this week, and posted online shortly. For more information, please contact Erin Carroll at erin.carroll@doe.virginia.gov

EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION (PART B)

VDOE is working with school divisions to ensure needs of most vulnerable children are met.

- **School Division Closure** - If a school division is closed and does not provide any educational services, then the school division is not required to provide services to students with disabilities
 - Once school resumes, the school division must make every effort to provide special education and related services to the child in accordance with the child's IEP / 504 Plan.
 - The IEP Team or the personnel responsible for implementing Section 504 are required to make an individualized determination as to whether compensatory services are needed under applicable standards and requirements.
- **Community-Based Placements** - If children with IEPs are served in community-based preschool or child care centers that remain open, the provision of services should still be provided to ensure the requirements of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) are met.
 - If services are not able to be provided per the IEP, the IEP Team would need to reconvene to determine how to meet child's needs.
- **Timelines** – Local school divisions should plan to support maintaining timelines as there is no new guidance on waivers.
 - Existing regulations already provide for certain types of flexibility with regard to holding meetings and for extending timelines. In addition, amendments to IEPs may be made without a meeting, and meetings may always be conducted virtually.

CHILD NUTRITION

Ensuring children have access to healthy meals during school or center closures is critical.

School-Based Programming:

- The VDOE is currently approving waivers to school divisions to authorize non-congregate feeding under the Summer Food Service Program.
- Local school divisions that are setting up drive-thru pickups, using school buses, and using faith-based organizations as pickup sites, etc., in order to ensure children under 18 have access to meals. An additional Superintendent's Memo regarding school nutrition will follow.
- Contact your local school division for local sites.
- For more information, please contact Sandy Curwood at sandra.curwood@doe.virginia.gov

Community-Based Programming:

- VDH and VDSS are currently working to address other food security issues related to COVID-19. For more information contact Paula Garrett at paula.garrett@vdh.virginia.gov or Conchetta Yonaitis at conchetta.yonaitis@vdh.virginia.gov