



## School Re-Opening Toolkit

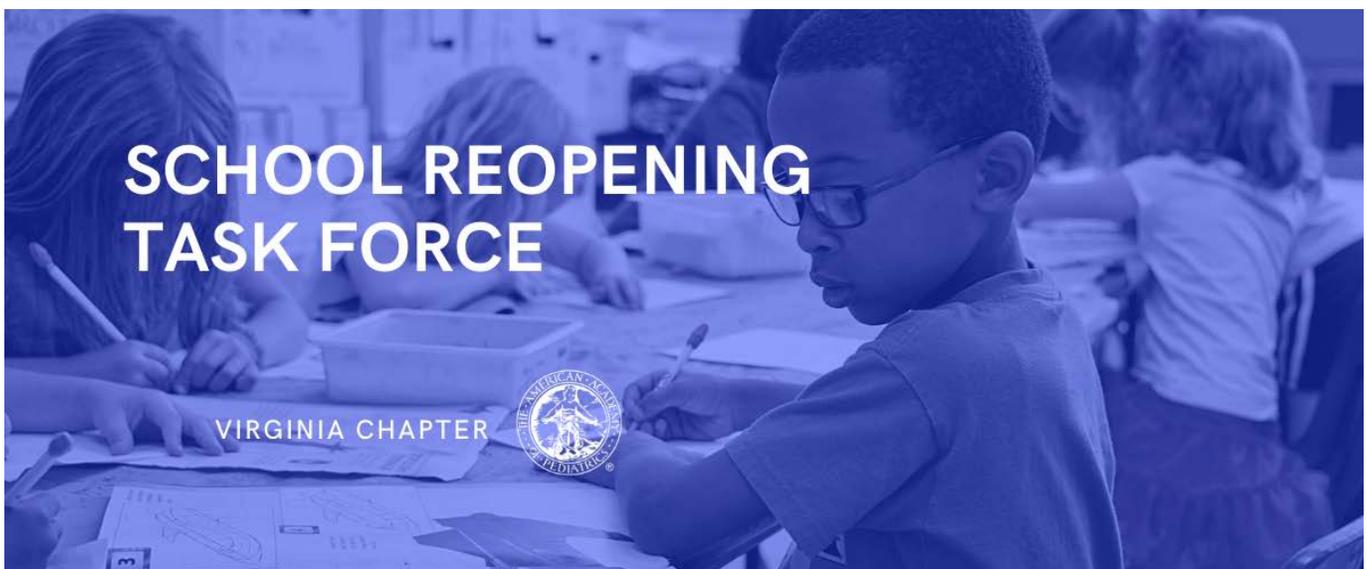
With the closing of schools, our children have suffered setbacks in development, stress, and decreased access to educational, health and social resources. Existing guidelines suggest that school officials should partner with local health departments when making decisions for their particular district, but available epidemiological data as provided by health departments is not in a format that is practical for schools to use to inform reopening.

We encourage grassroots partnerships between local physicians, administrators of school districts, and health departments to help schools use scientific data, rather than politics, to inform their reopening plans. Many administrators and school nurses need assistance in sorting through the excessive and sometimes conflicting guidelines on mitigation strategies for COVID.

*It will take the entire community, working alongside school systems, to tackle the challenges ahead, providing guidance and resources to keep students, teachers, school administrators and staff and families safe and secure.*

The pediatrician's role is critical to provide knowledge about COVID, especially as it pertains to children, and in developing strategies to reduce transmission, monitor outbreaks, and minimize anxiety within the school setting. Schools need YOU to sort through the news, go to source articles, and provide translation of existing guidelines.

*The Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics School Re-Opening Task Force developed this toolkit to help YOU, the pediatrician, get involved in school reopening's.*



## Toolkit Content

1. **Outreach**
  - a. How to introduce yourself if you do not have an existing partnership
    - i. Sample letter
    - ii. Sample phone script
  - b. Ways to connect with your local health department
  - c. Connect with school nurses, locally and with the state
2. **Education**
  - a. Handouts for families <testing; quarantine>
  - b. Note for families on why well visits still needed
  - c. Masking: exemption letter for office use
  - d. Sample return-to-school note after illness
3. **Resources** for YOU to stay up-to-date and informed

## *I want to help! Now what?*

### *Quick tips for outreach to your administrator's/school officials*

**Be persistent.** If you want to get involved, recognize that many officials are inundated with emails and phone calls (many are unpleasant or have hidden agendas). You may need to leave multiple messages and emails with the Superintendent and school nurses before you reach someone to connect you with decision-makers. Focus on simply saying “I am a local physician who wishes to assist your efforts in reopening schools safely. I am here to offer help.” *It may take several phone calls and emails before the connections are made. It’s worth the effort!*

**Know the roles.** The **Superintendent** with his team (academic officers, etc.) usually presents a school reopening plan to the school board who votes on aspects of opening. The **school board** is elected and has political pressures-- while many are well-meaning, some members may even use your words for political gain, so it is often best (when getting started) to address the entire board at once through group emails, or when speaking at a school board meeting. The **school nurse** (there may be one nurse who oversees all in a district) is also in a non-political role and has a major workload of the return-to-school planning. Some districts have a **SHAB “School Health Advisory Board”**.

**Recruit colleagues.** Some have partnered with adult physicians in outreach work with schools, as their expertise in adult medicine is often reassuring to teachers and staff. There’s power in small groups of committed individuals in helping schools move forward, especially in the era of politicization.

**Get support from your organization.** If working with a larger group of pediatricians, or a hospital system, it may be useful to let them know that you’re working on school reopening. You may find more support than you expect and find others who are also working with schools.

**New to media?** AAP has resources. You may find yourself in the newspaper for the first time, but that’s okay. The AAP has quick tips, and highlights include: stick to a simple message that you want to get across; use ‘pivot phrases’ to get back to your message (“that’s a good point, but what we do know”; “I wouldn’t say that, but what I would say is” etc.) Correct misinformation when you hear it.

## Sample Letter, Phone, and Email Script

### Sample Introduction Letter to School Officials

Date

Dear Superintendent/ Principal /School Nurse \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a practicing pediatrician in \_\_\_\_\_. The reopening of schools is a massive undertaking and requires the support of the entire community.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control recommend that local physicians be involved in supporting their schools, and I would like to help assist your efforts in planning and implementation of school re-entry.

In addition to the challenges of resuming educational instruction and providing physical distancing for students and staff, you are being tasked with addressing the physical, emotional and social needs of everyone in the schools, especially the students. As a pediatrician in the community, I would like to help provide you with information and support useful in your efforts, given the ongoing changes and challenges presented by the pandemic. Other districts have created partnerships between health departments, local physicians, and school nurses that have been very successful in informing school reopening plans.

Feel free to reach me by email xxxx and phone xxxx. I hope to be of assistance to you and your team!

Sincerely,

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**Sample Phone Script** (for school nurses; superintendents' offices; health department)

Hello, I am Dr. \_\_\_\_ a pediatrician working \_\_\_\_\_. I would like to be involved in supporting your efforts in opening your schools. Can you help connect me with those who are working on this? (offer email, phone number)

- Plan to have to clarify who you are and why you're doing what you're doing: eg "I know you're getting a lot of phone calls, but I want to help provide you with medical information to help your decisions."
- I am connected with the Virginia Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics who has recommended that I reach out to my local school to offer help in mitigation plans \_\_\_\_\_.

*Connect with your local health department*

Did you know that the VA-AAP is working on connecting pediatricians in their communities with local health departments? Contact Leah Munn at [lmunn@ramdocs](mailto:lmunn@ramdocs). if you need assistance in finding your local health department, and let the VA-AAP **This may change \*\***

**Sample Email** (can follow up with phone call)

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ or <insert school nurse name>

I am a local pediatrician working \_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate your expertise and work in our community, especially during the time of the COVID pandemic. I am contacting you to see if I may assist with your efforts in reopening schools during this time, so that we can partner in providing information to school districts. Is there a time that is convenient for us to connect?

I can be reached by email xxx or by phone xxx and look forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Patient Flyer: Why your child needs to visit the doctor***

Connecting with your healthcare provider for a well check or sick visit may seem scary and unnecessary in a time when we are all trying to minimize contact with one another and minimize the risk of infection. However, it's vital to maintain well visits, especially for children.

### ***The better your child's baseline health, the better they will be able to fight infection & stress.***

Well child checks allow you to go over all aspects of your child's physical and emotional well being. We have been working hard to create ways to safely communicate with your family and minimize in-person time in the office. We have changed the office environment to comply with physical distancing rules and we are deep cleaning regularly to keep you safe. Call us to find out about your options.

### ***It is vital that your child's vaccines are up to date.***

Vaccine-preventable illnesses like influenza (flu) and measles not only make you feel miserable when you have them, they also rob your immune system of the ability to fight other infections, including Covid-19. Flu vaccines are especially important if there is an increase in Covid-19 cases during flu season this fall and winter.

### ***Chronic medical conditions like asthma, allergies or diabetes must be optimally managed so that your child's baseline health is the best it can be.***

Having a plan in place for when your child is well and sick will make a big difference in how their body is able to fight illnesses.

### ***While distance learning has been important in keeping our children connected to their incredible teachers and education, it has also created challenges for children who need the vibrant school environment to thrive.***

Children with learning differences, focus-related issues or other disabilities miss services that help learning. Touching base with your pediatrician will allow you to create a plan with your child's school to best help them succeed.

### ***Physical distancing, social isolation and the child and family stressors during this pandemic are greatly affecting the mental health of children and their caretakers.***

Loss of caretaker jobs and income, lack of food, unstable housing and other stressors have impacted the social and emotional health of children. Many families are on edge. Children need mental health screenings and treatment in order to address all the factors affecting their overall well-being.

***We want to help your child thrive. Call us at (phone number) to make a plan that works for your family! Find more at [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).***

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-OK-to-call-the-pediatrician-during-COVID-19-even-if-Im-not-sure-my-child-is-sick.aspx>

## *Help! I'm not an expert on COVID!*

Nobody expects you to have all the answers, and it's good to acknowledge your limits. It's always okay to say: I'm not sure, but I'll see if I can find out.

Your baseline knowledge on how to find solid information, translate it into practical advice, and interpret guidelines from the AAP, CDC, and VDH can be a support to school officials whose expertise lies in education and operation of schools.

Ask questions, seek information, and know that schools need YOU to share your expertise!

## *Resources*

In addition to the VA-AAP, consider joining the *AAP Council on School Health* which has a listserv of members around the country.

***Vetted quick literature review for advising schools:***

<https://bit.ly/mghcovidlibrary>

This amazing resource library was put together by Massachusetts pediatricians, ID folks and school physicians to create a source of data for healthcare professionals who are advising K-12 schools and community organizations on COVID re-opening. The Resource Library has chapters on transmission, clinical outcomes, guidelines, impacts of remote (vs. in-person) learning, PPE, ventilation, sanitizing, distancing, busses, singing, band, sports, monitoring and symptom management, and testing. It is updated every few weeks as new data emerge. Please let us know ([covidresourcelibrary@gmail.com](mailto:covidresourcelibrary@gmail.com)) if you have suggestions on other data to add or new sections that would be helpful.

***Contact Tracing for COVID-19 in K-12 Schools: How to Prepare and What to Expect:***

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/08/Contact-Tracing-for-COVID->

[19-in-K-12\\_080520\\_Final.pdf](#)

***Handout for families after testing is performed: "What do results mean"***

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/05/VDH-COVID-19-Viral-Test-Results-Infographic.v4.pdf>

## Resources Cont.

### **Handout for families on isolation vs. quarantine**

[https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/07/Isolation-and-Quarantine-Whats-the-difference\\_1.pdf](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2020/07/Isolation-and-Quarantine-Whats-the-difference_1.pdf)

**General suggestions for school opening plans** (These may be helpful to read if you're just getting started.)

### **CHOP**

[https://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab-Policy-Review-School-Reopenings-August-2020\\_0.pdf](https://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab-Policy-Review-School-Reopenings-August-2020_0.pdf)

### **Harvard**

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<https://schools.forhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/06/Harvard-Healthy-Buildings-Program-Schools-For-Health-Reopening-Covid19-June2020.pdf>

### **AAP Guidelines for Reopening Schools**

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

### **CDC Guidelines for Reopening Schools**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

### **Virginia Department of Health**

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/k-12-education/>

### **World Health Organization**

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-schools-and-covid-19>

## *Toolkit courtesy of the VA-AAP School Re-Opening Task Force*

### **WHO WE ARE:**

The Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (VA-AAP) formed a task force of pediatricians to support safe school reopening efforts, given the complications around the COVID-19 pandemic. The group consists of a dozen pediatricians representing all regions of Virginia including clinicians from rural and urban areas with varied backgrounds and expertise.

### **OUR MISSION:**

We affirm the [AAP's school reopening guidelines](#) and provide support for pediatricians to engage local stakeholders in school reopening. This includes school nurses, teachers, school administrators, health departments, and parents. The goals of the group include:

- Advise the executive board on advocacy issues related to school reopening
- Develop knowledge and expertise on how to re-open schools safely and how to maintain a safe environment
- Provide a central source of educational materials for pediatricians across the commonwealth
- Work toward best practices for care of school children during the pandemic
- Identify practical action items such as implementing mask wearing
- Foster partnerships and communication with other organizations invested and guiding school reopening

### **CONTACT US:**

Leah Rowland, MD  
Chair, Task Force  
[leahcrowland@yahoo.com](mailto:leahcrowland@yahoo.com)

Michael Martin, MD  
President, VA-AAP  
[Michael.martin.md@gmail.com](mailto:Michael.martin.md@gmail.com)

Leah Munn  
Executive Director, VA-AAP  
[lmunn@ramdocs.org](mailto:lmunn@ramdocs.org)