

VCHIP CHAMP VDH COVID-19

June 17, 2020 | 12:15-12:45pm Call Questions and Answers\*

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**Practice Issues - COVID-19 Safe & Healthy School Guidance**

*Breana Holmes, MD, VDH*

I apologize to those of you who were at grand round this morning, since I'll be repeating some information here. With the lessons learned in childcare, our Task Force believes these are the 6 key items that will be coming out of the 22-page document being released later today. There's a lot of engagement with this topic in Vermont and the recent national AAP call on school re-opening was a good mix of folks who work in the schools and general pediatricians wondering where the sticking points are and how to help.

Temperature checks are on the list of debated areas with school health guidance. Some folks are doing them, some are not. Our infectious disease experts weighed in pretty heavily that this is an important piece of objective information to collect. We have a group we're going to convene shortly, including special educators, the Agency of Education and the Department of Mental Health, along with pediatricians like Dr. Jill Rinehart. We're going to get parents and youth involved as well and plan to spend the summer thinking about school health guidance for children with special health and/or educational needs. I do want to keep reminding the medical folks, especially family physicians on the call who see adults that we need medical home engagement for personal risk decisions made by staff, bus drivers and teachers, along with paraeducators and others about their (or members of their household's) age and chronic conditions in the context of COVID-19. You're going to be with me all winter long as we think about balancing illness and exclusions.

After a lot of discussion, the current approach to facial coverings in schools was determined. Specifically, all staff are required to wear facial coverings. Facial coverings are also required for middle and high school students. Facial coverings for elementary age students are required when developmentally appropriate based on child's ability to wear without sucking, touching or pulling. We did put a small clause in the final guidance related to pre-K, which is a part of many of our public schools through the date. This clause notes that facial coverings among pre-K children should be based on developmental appropriateness. Group size, integrity of the group and distancing and cohorting are the key public health approaches at the intersection of how to teach, especially with regards to older kids. So, the guidance calls out that high school is going to need some unique educational decisions about how to keep groups together and when you can mix cohorts based on the data and where we're at in August.

There are lots of resources on the VDH website (link here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19/schools-and-child-care-programs>), including one-pagers on the following topics: facial coverings, what parents can expect, child care in summer (school-specific version coming soon). We also have daily and weekly checklists for childcare and summer camps, so if you're asked at the community level to provide support to a group or program working with children this summer, these would be great resources for you.

As I said this morning during grand rounds, I see many roles for all of us and the first is to join any kind of COVID-19 coordination or task force with the school nurse leader opportunity. There are also opportunities for you to get involved in team-based care for children with special health and education needs. I know you're all really invested in social emotional health and we feel this will be an ongoing response in the time of COVID-19. Food security is a career passion of mine and we're advocating for universal meals, since many kids will be eating in classrooms. Let's decrease stigma and feed everyone. It would be great if some of you

\*Note: This is a paraphrased synopsis of the call and is not a word-for-word transcription.

with passion for environmental health were willing to jump in to help us understand the way COVID-19 works indoors with ventilation. This is going to get interesting in October when we close windows. There's great guidance from the CDC that you should hold classes outside, which is clearly meant for states like Florida. I'm going to create a slide deck of the key points of the guidance that all of you can use as our spokespeople in communities to give webinars and talk with school boards, staff and students and families.

As we mentioned on Monday, don't forget about your school liaisons. These folks are at the ready to hear from you and they want to make the connections to school nurses for you. Nate Waite, RN (VDH) is putting together a really solid deeper draft of who your school liaisons are, schools in your catchment area and corresponding school nurses.

### **Questions/Discussion**

**C: Breena Holmes, MD, VDH: Link to testing pop-ups planned for next week:**

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19/resources#testing>

**Q: If private schools don't have a school nurse, will the VDH nurses be available?**

*A: Breena Holmes, MD, VDH: Yes, independent schools have a guy named Mill Moore who has been on our task force and he's going to write a job description for a COVID-19 coordinator where can we find school nurse leadership to support what they call unlicensed school personnel to find a bench of people to be trained to provide COVID support in independent schools. In the time of COVID-19, I know financially you can't have a nurse in every private school, but you need school nurse leaders to support multiple schools because it's a pandemic and it's a virus. And I then I met with Harry Chen, our previous Health Commissioner, who is helping with the medical reserve corps and he's connecting with Mill Moore this week to figure out if there are volunteer medical professionals who would like to support independent schools in reopening in the age of COVID-19. It's our chance to say, recognizing finances are an issue, that we need school nursing leadership.*

*A: Ellen Gnaedinger, APRN, South Royalton Health Center, APRN: That's an excellent point Breena, because lay people cannot be taught the assessment skills that RN's have.*

*A: Breena Holmes, MD, VDH: I completely agree. For years we have been living in the imperfect world of school nurses training non-nurses in allergic reactions, diabetes management, etc.*

**Q: Are independent schools expected to adhere to the guidelines as well?**

*A: Breena Holmes, MD, VDH: Yes, independent schools follow the guidance as public schools.*

*A: Nathaniel Waite, RN, VDH: Some independent schools have also reached out to VDH about a sample position description for school nurses, so some may also be thinking about hiring one.*