# Superintendent’s Memo #051-20


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: February 21, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Addressing Misinformation Related to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

In [Superintendent's Memo 032-20](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2020/032-20.docx) dated February 7, 2020, information was sent to school divisions regarding the Novel Coronavirus or 2019nCOV. On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the official name change from Novel Coronavirus (2019nCOV) to COVID-19.

**Current Status of COVID-19 in Virginia**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) have notified the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) that there are currently no cases of COVID-19 in Virginia. The CDC updates this information daily on the [COVID-19 webpage](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html). The CDC has emphasized that the risk of contracting COVID-19 is **low** and that those at highest risk of contracting COVID-19 are the elderly and those with an underlying illness. Actively engaging your school community in [proactive health strategies](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/actions-prevent-flu.htm) may empower students, parents, and staff; improve knowledge and understanding of health information provided; and reduce disease transmission of any type.

**Preventing Discrimination of Students**

Speculation and misinformation about COVID-19 has created an environment of fear for some students, parents, and community members. The VDOE has been notified that this misinformation may have led to discrimination and/or harassment against some groups of students and families based on ethnicity, race, and national origin. It is imperative that schools take action to prevent discrimination and/or harassment towards any student.

**Resources**

To address the concerns associated with COVID-19, the [Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) (CDC) and the [Virginia Department of Health](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/) (VDH) provides up-to-date resources to inform students and parents about the realities of the illness while combating misinformation and fear-based rumors. To reduce spread of misinformation and rumors about COVID-19, schools are encouraged to use reliable information from the CDC and VDH to share with your school community. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides the [Model Policy to Address Bullying in Virginia's Public Schools](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/prevention/bullying/model_policy_to_address_bullying_in_va_schools.pdf) to assist school’s response in addressing potential hostilities.

**Guidelines for Student Attendance**

In cases where a student’s attendance at school is impacted by quarantine or related restrictions, parents are highly encouraged to notify their child’s school immediately. Absences due to illness, quarantine, or related restrictions should be considered excused absences. Schools should make every effort to minimize the impact of lost instructional time by providing at-home assignments or access to available instructional supports. The [United States Department of Education](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/oese-infectious-disease-guidance.pdf) (ED) provides additional guidelines to help schools plan for extended absences or school dismissal. While it is not expected that chronic absenteeism rates will be affected by COVID-19, schools concerned by a possible impact may explore the opportunity for their local school board to appeal a performance level indicator for state accreditation, as outlined in [8VAC20-131-380.F.6.](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section420/)

If there are questions regarding COVID-19, please contact Tracy White, VDOE School Health Specialist, by email at Tracy.White@doe.virginia.gov or by phone at (804) 786-8671.

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