



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

July 10, 2015

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Transmitting School Absentee Data to the Virginia Department of Health for the Purpose of Public Health Surveillance

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is requesting the assistance of school divisions in providing absentee data during the 2015-2016 school year. Routine monitoring of absentee levels helps public health officials identify disease outbreaks as they are emerging in schools and in the local community. This partnership between schools and public health allows the health department to offer guidance to schools on how to limit the spread of disease as well as provide fact sheets and letters for parents, teachers, and school administrators.

The VDH first requested student absentee information from schools during the H1N1 influenza pandemic and used it to monitor the impact of influenza on schools and the local community. Examining student absentee information allowed VDH to provide insight to school officials regarding which locations were heavily impacted and whether influenza activity was increasing or decreasing through the course of the pandemic. Student absentee information continues to be used to allow the health department to proactively reach out to schools when outbreaks of pertussis, norovirus, influenza or other communicable diseases emerge.

School divisions choosing to participate are asked to contact Amanda Wahnich via e-mail at syndromic@vdh.virginia.gov or by phone at (804) 864-7760 to discuss technical capabilities at the local level and receive instruction on how to initiate data transmission. Participating school divisions will be asked to submit the following information for each school on each day that the school is in session: the number of students enrolled and the number of students absent. The data will be transmitted in aggregate form by school, and no individual-level information will be shared.

This is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between your school division and your local health department, allowing for better communication and collaboration in the event of a disease outbreak or other public health incident. If you require technical support, please contact Amanda Wahnich, Virginia Department of Health, at syndromic@vdh.virginia.gov or (804) 864-7760. If you have questions regarding this initiative, please contact Amanda Wahnich or Tia Campbell, school health specialist, at Tia.Campbell@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 786-8671.

SRS/tbc

