

A Message to the Campus Community On the Start of the Fall Semester | Coronavirus

August 25, 2021

We are writing to update you on the important additional steps that we are taking since our last communication to help our students, faculty, staff, and postdocs safely navigate the semester and to provide important links to more information and resources. With the start of the academic year less than a week away, there is great excitement, expectation, and hope across Penn's vibrant campus. Many programs are already welcoming students through in-person programming and have had very successful classroom and group activities. At the same time, COVID and the Delta variant continue to weigh heavily on people's minds. We share your concerns and are listening and responding to them, in close collaboration with public health experts and officials.

Requiring Vaccination

We appreciate the tremendous positive response from the Penn community in complying with the University's vaccine requirement. With 90% of our faculty, staff, and postdocs and 88% of our students reporting being fully vaccinated to date, we remind everyone that all students, faculty, staff, postdocs, and other campus partners are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 for the Fall 2021 semester. Consistent with the recently revised [Philadelphia Department of Public Health guidance](#), the University will be requiring all faculty, staff and postdocs to be fully vaccinated, except for those with medical or religious exemptions, by **October 15, 2021**. We continue to offer vaccine clinics weekly. Unless you are granted an exemption, failure to report full vaccination will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. We are monitoring the availability of boosters and guidance on their administration in order to provide them as appropriate in a timely way. More details about vaccinations can be found at the [Penn COVID-19 Response website](#).

Requiring Gateway and Screening Testing

The dynamic nature of COVID requires us to be vigilant, responsive to emerging trends, and mindful of the wider communities in which we live and work. The recent emergence of the Delta variant exemplifies the type of development that merits a reexamination and expansion of our safety measures. Over the past several weeks, we have been closely monitoring the effects of the Delta variant across our region. While we are currently working well together as a community to keep our COVID positivity rates low on campus, the high transmission rates in Philadelphia and surrounding counties are concerning. Until further notice, we are therefore updating our surveillance testing protocols as follows:

- All students are required to participate in an initial gateway test upon arrival to campus. Today we announce that, beginning September 7, the University will be expanding the gateway testing requirement to include all faculty, staff, and postdocs. Faculty, staff, and postdocs are required to schedule and complete gateway testing by September 17. More information on how to schedule a test can be found in [this scheduling tip sheet](#).
- In addition, we are requiring all members of our community to participate in a screening test program. Beginning the week of September 13, all students enrolled in an on-campus program will be required to participate in a mandatory screening test program twice a month. All fully vaccinated faculty, staff, and postdocs who are accessing campus for any reason during the Fall 2021 term are required to participate in an ongoing screening test program. Each week, a random sample of those faculty, staff, and postdocs accessing campus will be notified by email if selected and will be required to get tested within two weeks of selection. Faculty and staff in clinical schools, as well as medical students on clinical rotations, will be required to follow their local guidance. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in a RedPass in the [PennOpen Pass](#) system. Students, faculty, staff, and postdocs who have not yet reported being fully vaccinated must continue to test twice a week unless they submit vaccine documentation. After October 15, those who have been granted a medical or religious exemption from vaccination will be required to continue to test twice a week.

This screening test requirement is an important step to help us all better understand the rate of transmission among vaccinated individuals on our campus. The testing program will be very similar to the saliva-based program we provided last Spring and will require advance scheduling. In addition, any member of the Penn community who wants to access a COVID screening test for any reason may participate in volunteer testing by [scheduling a screening test](#).

Quarantine, isolation, and contact tracing capacity will also be expanded as needed. We will continue to work closely with public health experts and revise the manner and frequency of testing as the situation evolves. You can always find up-to-date information at the [Penn Cares website](#).

On-Campus Protocols & Guidance

- **PennOpen Pass is again required of all members of the Penn community.** We will be requiring all members of the Penn community to participate in [PennOpen Pass](#), the University's daily symptom tracker designed to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread within the Penn community.
- **Masks are required indoors for all, even those who are fully vaccinated.** Consistent with our August 5, 2021 message, the University requires that all members of the Penn community and visitors wear masks while indoors or in public or shared spaces. Detailed information about the exceptions can be found on our [Public Health Guidance page](#). Information about types of masks can be found at: [Universal Mask and Cloth Face Covering Precautions](#). We have also implemented a process for reporting non-compliance with the mask mandate through a [simple online form](#).
- **Resources and guidance are in place for instructors teaching in-person.** The Provost's Office has developed an [FAQ for instructors](#) that includes information about teaching while masked, classroom protocols, and other resources. In particular, faculty seeking a medical accommodation can contact the Office of Affirmative Action (OAA) and Equal Opportunity Programs at [215-898-6993](tel:215-898-6993) or oaacop@pobox.upenn.edu.
- **Updated guidance on events and gatherings.** Special events and large gatherings are strongly recommended to be held outside and with precautions in place. Additional requirements apply to any Penn-sponsored event with visitors, which require attendees to attest to being fully vaccinated and to register their contact information in case follow-up is needed. Further information on events and gatherings is available on the [Penn Coronavirus website](#).
- **Continued updated guidance for Faculty, Staff, and Postdocs.** Human Resources maintains a [comprehensive guide](#) with policies and protocols for returning to campus work. Faculty and staff are encouraged to be familiar with the guide, which is updated regularly when there are changes to the University's protocols or policies. Faculty, staff, and postdocs needing workplace accommodations should visit the [Office of Affirmative Action](#).
- **Review of building and facilities compliance.** Each building at Penn has specific heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Facilities and Real Estate Services and Environmental Health and Radiation Safety have conducted building-by-building HVAC systems condition and performance reviews. All occupied on-campus buildings are in compliance with the prevailing International Building Code and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers standards for ventilation. More information on your HVAC systems and other facilities resources can be found on the [Facilities and Real Estate Services website](#).

We are grateful to everyone for enabling us all to provide a robust academic environment, to keep students safely on track for their degrees, to sustain an active research enterprise, to care for patients, and to help support our neighbors and local community. As always, we are closely monitoring conditions and consulting with public health experts, and we will continue to adjust our policies as needed based on scientifically informed data. With a shared commitment to keeping our campus as safe as possible, we are confident that Penn will continue to offer an education of the highest quality on one of the most beautiful campuses in America and in a supportive environment filled with exciting opportunities.

Amy Gutmann, President
 Beth Winkelstein, Interim Provost
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