

# Pitt's Virus Control Program for the Fall | Office of the Chancellor

Dear Pitt Community Members:

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## The basics

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, the University of Pittsburgh's fundamental strategy has focused on minimizing the risk of infection related to the coronavirus while maximizing our ability to carry out our mission activities of teaching, research and service. Before highlighting the difference in our approach for this fall, let me quickly summarize the basics that continue to guide us.

Our virus control program can be divided into roughly three approaches, differing by how targeted the measures are. In order of increasing specificity, they are:

- *Global mitigation*, which involves measures **taken by everyone** to lower the risk of person-to-person transmission of the virus. Familiar examples include social distancing and avoiding large gatherings, universal use of face coverings, good hand hygiene, etc.
- *Containment*, which involves measures—**taken by those infected or potentially exposed**—to lower the risk of transmission. Examples include testing to identify infection, contact tracing to identify exposures, and the use of isolation and quarantines.
- *Immunization*, which stimulates an immune response in **each individual** that protects against serious illness and lowers the risk of transmission. The COVID-19 vaccines widely available today have proven to be safe and highly effective—including against the prevailing delta variant.

These measures work. Last year, using only global mitigation and containment strategies, we were able to control the virus in our on-campus environment.

Today, with the widespread availability of effective and safe vaccines, we can further tailor our mitigation and containment strategies to achieve a very low risk of transmission on our campuses, even with the new delta variant.

## Vaccines

Vaccines are a game-changer. They protect individuals from serious illness, cut the risk of transmission and collectively reduce our reliance on global mitigation approaches in favor of targeted containment strategies. This, in turn, minimizes the disruptions to our program and activities while ensuring the safety of everyone on our campuses.

For these reasons, Pitt is **strongly advising everyone in our community to get fully vaccinated as soon as possible**. We are incentivizing, offering and promoting vaccination with the goal of having everyone on our campuses fully vaccinated—barring medical or religious exemptions—when classes begin.

Coverage of “vaccine mandates” at other colleges and universities is causing confusion about Pitt's approach, and is misleading. A vaccine mandate is an enforced requirement that would prohibit unvaccinated individuals from accessing an institution's campuses, buildings and programs.

While our goal is to have everyone fully vaccinated, enforcing a vaccination mandate is not realistic for many reasons. In fact, most universities and colleges that have announced vaccination “mandates” are also—just like Pitt—preparing to accommodate unvaccinated individuals on campus and in university activities.

***The University of Pittsburgh is not neutral on vaccination.*** Everyone who can get vaccinated should be vaccinated—and our objective is to achieve very high immunization rates on our campuses.

## Our approach this fall

We ***are mandating compliance with our virus control program for everyone*** at the University, including students, faculty, staff, guests and contractors. Due to the effectiveness of the vaccines, global mitigation and containment strategies may be relaxed for individuals who are fully vaccinated. Therefore, the virus control program requirements that apply to you ***will generally depend on your vaccination status.***

We will only know if you are fully vaccinated if you provide us proof of your vaccination status. By early August, we plan to release details on how students, faculty and staff can voluntarily disclose their vaccination status to the University. In general, Pitt will ***assume that every student, faculty and staff member is unvaccinated until they disclose otherwise and provide evidence of being fully vaccinated.*** The use of an individual's vaccination status will be limited to the purposes of our virus control program by appropriately authorized personnel.

Our COVID-19 Medical Response Office (CMRO)—working in close collaboration with our Healthcare Advisory Group—will continue to modify mitigation and containment measures so that we can effectively prevent and limit the spread of the virus on our campuses. Like last year, we may adjust these measures based on the risk of infection in our environment and due to changes in federal, state and local health guidance. Unlike last year, these measures will be tailored based on your disclosed vaccination status.

If you are not fully vaccinated (or have not disclosed this information to us), you ***will be required*** to participate in the following containment measures:

- Mandatory virus testing—the frequency will be established by our CMRO, but this could be as often as once a week.
- Contact tracing to identify potential exposure.
- Quarantine and/or isolation if exposed or infected.
- For students living in on-campus housing: Negative COVID-19 test results before arrival.

Global mitigation requirements (e.g., universal masking) may continue apply to everyone, as determined by our Healthcare Advisory Group.

**Failure to comply with any required virus control measure may result in disciplinary action, including the loss of access to University buildings and activities.**

We will be releasing more information about our approach—including how to voluntarily disclose your vaccination status—in the weeks ahead. Please continue to monitor your email and [coronavirus.pitt.edu](https://coronavirus.pitt.edu) for additional information.

Wishing you all a restful and healthy remainder of the summer,

Patrick Gallagher