

Friday, September 11, 2020

News for Faculty and Instructors: Penn State and COVID-19

This twice-weekly email is designed to provide faculty and instructors with Penn State's pandemic-related news and updates during the Fall 2020 semester. Watch for these emails on Tuesdays and Fridays, with additional "special editions" delivered periodically. Previous faculty news digests are [archived here](#). For current Fall 2020 faculty guidance, resources, FAQ documents, and more visit the "[Back to State Info for Faculty](#)" webpage.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Q: Who is considered to be a 'close contact' in the contact tracing process? Do close contacts have to quarantine or isolate? Will I be identified as a close contact if a student in my class tests positive?

A: Consistent with Centers for Disease Control/PA Department of Health guidance, Penn State defines a close contact as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 10 minutes starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic clients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

Traditional classroom settings have been re-configured with an "instructor zone" to create at least 6 feet or more of physical separation between the instructor and the nearest student. In addition, classroom occupancies have been greatly reduced to maintain at least 6 feet clearance between student seating. This is illustrated in "[Instruction, Universal Masking and PPE Recommendations](#)" (pages 8 and 9). As long as 6 feet of physical distancing is maintained, then the students and instructors would not be deemed close contacts if someone in the class were to test positive for COVID-19.

In instructional settings where contact is closer than 6 feet for more than 10 minutes, those individuals should be identified by the positive individual through the contact tracing process and would be required to quarantine. Although some faculty and students have been issued face shields as an added layer of protection in these settings, this does not necessarily exclude these individuals as close contacts.

Those identified as close contacts are quarantined for 14 days from the date of the last contact and tested. If they test positive, they are isolated. If not, they remain in quarantine for a period of 14 days from the date of the last contact.

Q: What was the University's approach to its pre-arrival testing strategy?

A: On June 2, 2020, the University charged a Health Resources Task Group to develop options and recommendations for testing and contact tracing that could minimize the risk of COVID-19 disease transmission and enable a return to working and learning on campuses. A seven-person steering committee, with support from 30 individuals from University Park, the College of Medicine, and the Commonwealth campuses, submitted a report on July 2, 2020, which informed the sample testing and contact tracing strategy adopted by the University. The report is accessible via [this link](#).

There has been interest in the University's simulation modeling that informed its pre-arrival testing strategy. The University based its approach on modeling that showed that if the number of students returning to campus infectious was less than 50, there was a high likelihood of avoiding an outbreak that would exceed local hospital capacity. The report provides greater detail. The pre-arrival process is complete. A full analysis, available on the [virusinfo FAQ site](#), suggests the number of potentially infectious students returning to University Park to start the semester would have been less than or equal to 38.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Two contact tracing student [referral forms](#) are now available; one allows students to self-report concerns and the other allows individuals to refer students who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who may have been exposed.
- The University has updated its [COVID-19 dashboard](#) with [on-demand testing and random screening results](#) from period of September 4-10, as well as updated results from the prior week.
- The [flexible instructional modes developed for the fall 2020 semester](#), along with limited classroom capacities, will remain in place at all Penn State campuses in spring 2021, provided that the public health landscape allows for some in-person instruction.
- Faculty and staff are encouraged to [report student progress in Starfish](#) to allow for a collaborative and proactive approach to assisting undergraduates. At a time when many students are learning remotely, Starfish is the central place for instructors to document and share the successes or challenges a student may be encountering in a course. It gives instructors the ability to note areas of concern, like whether they believe their students have reliable access to technology; and other important indicators of student progress, such as absences or inadequate class participation or completion of assignments.
- Students in a 400-level sports journalism class have [adapted to the pandemic](#) by writing accounts of a socially-distanced miniature golf tournament.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- As part of the University's testing and contact tracing plan, Penn State has launched the [Testing and Surveillance Center \(TASC\)](#), to be used for random asymptomatic surveillance testing at the University Park campus.
- Numerous groups and individuals within Penn State IT have been [supporting the University's COVID efforts](#) since the spring. IT's efforts support teaching, learning, contact tracing, and more.
- [Faculty can still submit questions](#) related to Penn State's plans for a return to classrooms in the fall. Questions may be submitted [here](#).
- Professional development and training opportunities are available to faculty in preparation for the Fall 2020 semester. [Upcoming webinars for instructors](#) at all Penn State campuses include:
 - Tuesday, September 15, 12:00-1:00 p.m., [College Students' Use and Acceptance of Emergency Online Learning Due to COVID-19](#)
 - Wednesday, September 16, 12:00-1:30 p.m., [Assessment for Learning Impact Now](#)
 - Thursday, September 17, 2:00-4:00 p.m., [Hands-On Online Learning Opportunities](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To obtain comprehensive, updated information at any time, please review:

- The University's comprehensive resources on its ["Back to State" page](#) and [updated FAQs](#) regarding on-campus work and learning this fall
- Penn State's ["Keep Teaching"](#) and ["Keep Learning"](#) websites, including many [Fall 2020 instruction-related FAQs](#) and [new webinars](#)
- Penn State's [COVID-19 dashboard](#)
- The online archive of [video messages](#) from Penn State leaders and experts
- The [Office of Human Resources COVID-19 information site](#) and ["Return to Work on Campus"](#) resource site
- The ["University Measures" webpage](#), which summarizes steps Penn State is taking in response to COVID-19
- The University's [health information page focused on personal safety practices](#) for individuals at all campuses
- A robust, updated [list of contacts and resources](#) for the University community
- The Social Science Research Institute [website featuring pandemic-related insights from University experts](#) and other resources