Friday, February 26, 2021

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 Spring 2021 semester. Watch for these emails on Tuesdays and Fridays, with additional “special editions” delivered periodically. Previous faculty news digests are archived here. For current faculty guidance, resources, FAQ documents, and more visit the “Back to State Info for Faculty” webpage.

FEATURED VIDEO

- As part of the “COVID-19 Vaccines: Asked and Answered” video series, Suresh Kuchipudi, clinical professor of veterinary and biomedical sciences, explains that the J&J vaccine is backed by years of research and has been shown through rigorous clinical trials to be safe and effective.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State’s COVID-19 Dashboard shows ongoing results for all COVID-19 tests administered on campus since December 19, 2020, for faculty, staff, and students.

- Penn State is planning a phased return over the summer semester to a full on-campus learning environment for fall 2021. The University’s priorities continue to be the health and well-being of its students, faculty, staff and local communities, and the plans for expanded in-person classes have the flexibility built in to quickly respond to changing pandemic conditions, if necessary.

- Penn State is adjusting its spring 2021 COVID-19 testing strategy to increase the use of walk-up testing among students and implement additional rapid testing at the various testing locations on the University Park campus.

- Students who have a positive test result in the myUHS portal from within the last 90 days do not need to participate in required University testing and should not seek testing within this time period.

- Gathering feedback from your students early in the semester helps gauge their learning and can provide you with valuable data for making course adjustments. Download a PSU learning survey specific to your COVID instructional mode and place it in your Canvas course to collect feedback. Instructions are provided: how to import student feedback surveys from Canvas Commons into your course. Once in your course, you can customize the content to meet your needs. Read about additional options for gathering feedback on the Keep Teaching site or view the Fall 2020 webinar on this topic.
• Penn State Health provided COVID-19 vaccines to more than 1,400 members of the public who meet current Phase 1A eligibility on its first day operating four new, dedicated vaccine sites across central Pennsylvania on Monday, February 22.

• A team of scientists including researchers from Penn State has discovered additional locations on the SARS-CoV-2 Spike protein that may not only help to explain how certain mutations make emerging variants more infectious, but also could be used as additional targets for therapeutic intervention.

• The optimal timeframe for donating convalescent plasma for use in COVID-19 immunotherapy is within 60 days of the onset of symptoms, according to a new Penn State-led study.

• Penn State faculty discuss the impacts of the pandemic on people’s lives, including the strategies people use to cope with fear and impacts of psychological stresses on family dynamics.

• Barrett Scroggs, assistant professor of human development and family studies at Penn State Mont Alto, has been examining the mental health of LBGTQ emerging adults during the pandemic.

WEBINARS

• Mentoring March – A Workshop Series for Faculty Mentoring Graduate Students. Effective mentoring is an invaluable component of graduate students’ success, and is even more important and challenging during the pandemic, which has introduced even more complexity into developing and maintaining strong mentoring relationships.
  o Effective Communication, Wednesday, March 3, 12:30–1:30 p.m.
  o Aligning Expectations, Thursday, March 11, 12:30–1:30 p.m.
  o Addressing Equity and Inclusion, Thursday, March 25, 12:30–1:30 p.m.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

• This article provides an overview of COVID-19 resources for faculty.

• While Penn State has not been named a distribution site for COVID-19 vaccines, the University has made comprehensive plans to assist quickly if asked.

• Walk-up COVID-19 testing hours at the University Park campus will be extended in the coming weeks.
o Week of Feb. 15 and onward: Walk-up testing at the Hintz Family Alumni Center will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

o Beginning Feb. 15, employees and students will have separate entrances and separate queues.

This walk-up testing is available to employees who are in the Return to Work database at University Park. Employees in that database also continue to have the option to do the opt-in mail kit testing.

• In Pennsylvania, the state Department of Health and county health departments are responsible for COVID-19 vaccine distribution, which is being done in a phased approach with health care workers and those in long-term care facilities in the initial phase (Phase 1A). At this time Penn State is not a point of distribution for the vaccine, but has a comprehensive plan developed for how the University could quickly activate should this change. In the meantime, those that are eligible are strongly urged to sign up as soon as possible. Faculty, staff, and students should visit Pennsylvania’s vaccine website for information on when they may be eligible to receive a vaccine and where those vaccines may be available in their communities.

• Faculty can still submit questions related to Penn State’s COVID response. Questions may be submitted here.

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
• Penn State’s “Keep Teaching” and “Keep Learning” websites, including many Spring 2021 instruction-related FAQs
• Penn State’s COVID-19 dashboard
• Previous issues of this Digest
• 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