

Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education Requirements and Best Practices

Updates: 8/24/22

- Updated post-exposure guidance to align with Health Officer Quarantine Order issued 05/18/2022.
- For the upcoming 2022-2023 school year, masking policy for all students, staff and visitors will reflect current language in the LA County Health Officer Order. At this time, masks are strongly recommended for all persons in indoor public settings. Well-fitting and better filtering masks (e.g., double masks, high filtration cloth masks, medical masks) and respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s) are highly recommended. Changes to IHE masking recommendations and requirements may reflect changes in health officer orders and/or changes in community and school conditions including: the level of community and/or school transmission; illness severity associated with COVID-19; vaccine effectiveness against new emerging strains of the virus; and updates to state or federal guidance.
- Updated guidance on COVID-19 case reporting to Public Health. As of August 1, 2022, schools will be required to report clusters of 3 or more cases of COVID-19 who were on campus at any point within the 14 days prior to illness onset date in a classroom, office, or other pre-defined or identifiable group (i.e., cohort, team/club, etc.). IHE should report the cluster with the information for the cases through SPOT immediately, and no later than 1 business day.
- Changes in response and outbreak testing requirements for employers to align with updated [Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards \(ETS\)](#) and the [LA County Health Officer Order](#)
- New information on mask exemptions.
- New content regarding asymptomatic screening, to include individuals regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status, when implemented.

Given the ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and the possibility of more emerging variants of concern, a layered approach to prevention that includes all individuals on campus staying up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccination status, optimizing ventilation in indoor spaces, and wearing well-fitting, highly protective masks when around others in public spaces, especially indoors, remains critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Per published reports, factors that increase the risk of infection, including transmission to people more than 6 feet away, include:

- **Enclosed spaces with inadequate ventilation or air handling** that allow for build-up of exhaled respiratory fluids, especially very fine droplets and aerosolized particles, in the air space.

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- **Increased exhalation of respiratory droplets** that can occur when an infectious person is engaged in physical exertion or raises their voice (e.g., exercising, shouting, singing).
- **Prolonged exposure** to these conditions.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to enhance safety for their students, faculty, staff, and communities, and lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission on their campuses. In addition to this information, please remember:

- Requirements for employees **may exceed** those for students and visitors. Employers must follow the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (Cal/OSHA ETS) and the LA County [Health Officer Order](#). **In instances where LA County Public Health orders and Cal/OSHA ETS are not in full alignment, the more stringent requirements must be adhered to.**
- IHE that host indoor events with more than 1,000 attendees or outdoor events with more than 10,000 attendees **should refer to [Guidance for Mega Events](#), and follow recommended best practices to lower risk of viral transmission during such events.**

Prevent and Reduce Transmission Among the Campus Community

- **Encourage vaccination** of faculty, staff, and students, including indicated booster doses so all on campus remain up-to-date. Vaccines are safe and effective and are the best way to limit COVID-19 outbreaks on your campus and in the community. Although up-to-date individuals may still become infected, the vaccines show their greatest effectiveness at limiting severity of illness and preventing hospitalization and the most dire consequences of infection, including death. Primary vaccine series alone provide less protection against infection with the Omicron variant and subvariants of SARS-CoV-2, compared to someone who has received their booster doses. Consider offering COVID-19 vaccination clinics on-campus, promoting vaccine trust and confidence among the school community, and adopting policies that strongly encourage or require all faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated. IHE should also consider offering vaccination opportunities to members of the surrounding community as feasible.
- **Wearing a well-fitting highly protective mask is strongly recommended, especially when indoors** as described in the Los Angeles County [Health Officer Order](#). The purpose of continued masking is to prevent transmission to persons with higher risk of infection (e.g., unvaccinated or immunocompromised persons), to persons with prolonged, cumulative exposures, or to persons whose vaccination status is unknown. Even fully vaccinated persons have a risk of getting infected, and a booster dose can significantly decrease that risk, but masking at all times when indoors and in presence of others outside the household protects the wearer and those around them, vaccinated or unvaccinated.
 - **All individuals**, regardless of vaccination status, are strongly recommended to wear a well-fitting facemask over the nose and mouth while indoors. **For the upcoming 2022-2023 school year, masking policy for all students, staff and visitors will reflect current language in the LA County [Health Officer Order](#). At this time, masks are strongly recommended for all persons in indoor public settings. Well-fitting and better filtering masks (e.g., double masks, high filtration cloth masks, medical masks) and respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s,**

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KF94s) are highly recommended. Changes to IHE masking recommendations and requirements may reflect changes in health officer orders and/or changes in community and school conditions including: the level of community and/or school transmission; illness severity associated with COVID-19; vaccine effectiveness against new emerging strains of the virus; and updates to state or federal guidance.

- **Mask Exemption Policy:** At times when the Health Officer Order requires universal masking in indoor public settings, alternative protective strategies may be adopted to accommodate individuals cannot safely wear a mask or in situations where use of masks is challenging due to pedagogical reasons, safety, or an existing disability. Individuals may be exempt from wearing a mask for the following reasons:

- Persons younger than two years old.
- Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability and whose medical provider has determined that it is unsafe for them to wear a mask, may request an exemption. A certification from a state licensed health care provider attesting that the individual has a condition or disability that precludes them from wearing a mask safely may be accepted as proof of exemption. The following licensed health care professionals may provide such attestations: Medical providers including physician (MD or DO), nurse practitioner (NP), or physician assistant (PA) practicing under the authority of a licensed physician; and licensed mental and behavioral health practitioners including Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), clinical psychologist (Psy.D.) Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC), or Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT).

- **Employers are required to offer medical grade masks and respirators to all faculty and staff who work indoors in contact with others.**
- **Be supportive** of students, faculty, and staff who choose to wear a mask for any reason, whether as a personal choice or because they have a medical condition that places them at increased risk of severe illness.
- **Physical distancing** in lecture halls, specialized classroom settings, and all other indoor spaces remains a useful mitigation strategy and is recommended if it does not interfere with campus operations. Increasing physical distance between individuals is recommended in settings where masking is not maintained, such as in dining halls. Reducing density and total number of individuals in indoor spaces is also helpful, and a natural result of encouraging physical distancing. There are no mandates at this time to impose physical distancing requirements or capacity limits, beyond maximum capacity set by the fire marshal.

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Screening, Contact Tracing, & Quarantine/Isolation

- **Have students, faculty and staff members screen themselves daily for symptoms** before entering classes and other campus activities and ask those living off campus not to come to campus if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are under isolation orders.
- **Anyone with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) (regardless of vaccination status) should get [tested](#)** for COVID-19 and be immediately [isolated](#) away from others. If they test positive, they need to remain isolated from others for a period of 5-10 days, depending on follow up testing and resolution of symptoms, as described in the [Exposure Management Plan for Institutes of Higher Education](#).
- **Tell people who have had close contact** with someone with COVID-19 to get tested **3-5 days** after their last date of exposure **to determine their infection status**. They are also required to **wear a highly protective mask while indoors and when in close contact around others outdoors for a total of 10 days after their last contact with someone infected with Covid-19**. If they develop symptoms or test positive during their **post-exposure** period, they need to isolate for an additional period of time. Length of isolation and requirements for release is described in the [Exposure Management Plan for Institutes of Higher Education](#).
- **IHE should continue to support case investigation and contact tracing** as directed by LAC Department of Public Health and detailed in the IHE Exposure Management Plan.
- **IHE should arrange transportation** for those who need to isolate or quarantine and for them to get tested. IHE should also provide housing for symptomatic students to isolate and, where appropriate, for closecontacts who need to quarantine. IHE should have a plan to ensure that isolated/quarantined students can participate in remote learning, or if their symptoms prevent such participation, that they canaccess academic support services such as tutoring and advising to assist in the transition to remote learning. IHE should also develop a plan to meet these students' other basic needs andprovide access to mental health support.

Testing for COVID-19

- **IHE must ensure** that all employees and students, regardless of vaccination status, have access to response testing if they develop symptoms or have been a close contact to aconfirmed case of COVID-19.
 - Note that current Cal/OSHA ETS require employers to offer testing at no cost to employees during paid time for:
 - Symptomatic employees, regardless of whether there is a known exposure.
 - All employees after an exposure with the exception of staff close contacts who were previously infected with SARS-CoV-2 within the last 90 days.
 - Testing must be provided for all employees exposed during an outbreak regardless of vaccination status.

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- **Weekly asymptomatic screening testing is not required at this time** but may be useful when community transmission is high. If an IHE is implementing screening testing, it is recommended that individuals be included in the screening program regardless of vaccination status. Asymptomatic testing is not appropriate for someone who was infected with COVID-19 in the past 90 days.
- Students who participate in apprenticeships or internships provided off-campus at a non-IHE business or facility, should adhere to the same COVID-19 safety protocols (including testing and masking policies) implemented for other employees of the off-campus business or facility.
- Asymptomatic students and staff who are exposed to an infected individual are exempt from quarantine regardless of vaccination status. Testing is not required for asymptomatic individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 within the last 90 days, as long as they remain symptom-free. Please refer to the [IHE Exposure Management Plan](#) for further guidance.

Reduce crowding, especially indoors

- **In classroom settings**, consider offering large lecture classes online simultaneously with in-person to reduce crowded lecture halls by reducing the number of students in classrooms at any given time.
- **In dorms or residence halls**, it is recommended, where possible, to assign unvaccinated students to single rooms. Where there is not sufficient supply of single rooms to accommodate all unvaccinated students, it is safer to place individual unvaccinated students with roommates or suitemates who are fully vaccinated, rather than to cohort unvaccinated students together. Surrounding unvaccinated persons with vaccinated individuals provides some degree of additional protection for the unvaccinated, while fully vaccinated and boosted students are already well-protected against serious illness. This may prevent or limit transmission and outbreaks in student residences and better protect the unvaccinated individuals who carry increased risk of developing severe illness.
- **Roommates/suitemates** can be considered a household unit and do not need to wear masks or physically distance when in the group's living space (dorm room or suite) unless someone in the household is ill. Otherwise, it is strongly recommended that all residents wear masks indoors whenever they are around others in common areas of congregate housing facilities, except when engaged in an activity where masks are obviously not feasible (e.g., while showering, eating, oral hygiene). Refer to CDC [Guidance for Retirement and Shared Housing](#) for more recommendations on how to create and maintain more safety in communal living settings.
 - It is recommended that IHE keep some housing vacant for isolation purposes. Each IHE should have a COVID-19 prevention plan that addresses and prepares for this need.
- **In dining halls**, follow DPH Best Practices for [Food and Beverage Service](#). Continue to offer to-go meals for students who prefer not to eat in the dining halls.
- **If you have fitness centers** on campus, follow DPH [Best Practices for Exercising Indoors](#) in your gyms, sports facilities, or fitness centers.

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- **If you offer internal campus transportation** such as busses or vans, these are now considered private transportation methods and the LA County Health Officer Order regarding masking on public transit no longer apply to these vehicles. However, it is still strongly recommended that all passengers and driver or other staff wear masks at all times unless the driver is alone in the vehicle. Consider opening windows to increase ventilation.
- **Considerations for performing arts classes.** Performing arts activities may present increased risk for viral transmission, especially during times of increased exertion or voice projection. Additional recommendations to improve safety and mitigate risk are appropriate for these situations.
 - Moving rehearsal, practice, instruction, and performance outdoors is recommended, especially when singing and/or playing of wind instruments is occurring.
 - When rehearsal, practice or instruction occurs indoors, wearing masks is strongly recommended for all participants, as practicable, unless an individual is practicing in an enclosed space alone.
 - Routine screening testing at least once per week for all participants, regardless of vaccination status, is strongly recommended for activities with increased exertion or voice projection, such as dance, drama, theater, especially if masks are not worn at all times during indoor practice, rehearsal, and instruction.
 - Additional precautions for singing and playing wind instruments:
 - It is strongly recommended that singers wear masks during rehearsal, practice or instruction indoors, where practicable. Singers who practice or rehearse indoors without masks should don their mask when they are not actively vocalizing. It is strongly recommended that singers maintain some physical distance from all other participants while actively vocalizing. Three (3) feet is minimum recommendation; six (6) feet preferred.
 - It is strongly recommended that players of wind instruments wear modified masks and employ instrument bell covers while playing wind instruments indoors, unless they are playing in an enclosed space alone. It is strongly recommended that players of wind instruments don full masks indoors when not actively playing. It is strongly recommended to create physical distance between a musician playing a wind instrument and all other participants. Three (3) feet is minimum recommendation; six (6) feet preferred. Water and saliva build up (i.e., spit valves) should be emptied into proper receptacles only.
 - Routine testing at least once per week is strongly recommended for an entire performing arts class or group if participants are practicing, rehearsing, or receiving instruction indoors, especially if masks and instrument bell covers are not used at all times, and the activities include increased exertion (e.g., dance), vocal projection (e.g., drama, theater, singing), or wind instruments.

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- For live indoor student performances that include audiences, it is strongly recommended that all non-performers in attendance wear masks. For student performances that are not done while wearing masks, it is strongly recommended that all performers and stage crew working in close proximity to performers test at least once per week, regardless of vaccination status, starting no more than 72 hours before they begin working together with the performance ensemble until the end of the production and performance schedule.
- **Considerations for college sports.** Up to date vaccination status is strongly recommended for all college sports participants, coaches, and support staff. Teams should consider opportunities to train, practice, and compete outdoors rather than indoors whenever possible. College sports teams should follow the most recent [NCAA COVID-19 guidelines](#). For games and competitions in indoor settings, during play all spectators, coaches, staff, and any players not actively competing (i.e., on the bench or sidelines) are strongly recommended to be masked at all times.

Ventilate

- **Since the virus spreads more readily** between people indoors than outdoors, improving air exchange to reduce the concentration of viral particles can help reduce risk in indoor environments.
 - Continue to maintain your building's HVAC system in good, working order.
 - Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
 - When weather and working conditions allow, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Consider using fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows – position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
 - Decrease occupancy, where feasible, in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.
 - Consider moving classroom and other activities outdoors as feasible.
- **See** CDPH [Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#).

Routine Cleaning

- **IHE should consider developing [routine cleaning plans](#)** that prioritize cleaning high-touch surfaces and areas that are used most frequently and those that entail intensive hands-on engagement with equipment, such as in CTE or STEM labs. IHE should provide individuals responsible for the cleaning and disinfection of facilities with the appropriate PPE.

Support Handwashing & Respiratory Etiquette

- **Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizer** (that contains at least 60% alcohol) at entrances, outside classrooms, communal bathrooms and dormitories with signage promoting use.

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- **Encourage frequent handwashing** and respiratory etiquette by ensuring sink functionality, along with ample supplies of hand soap, tissues, and other essentials for proper [hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette](#) are maintained throughout the campus.

Communicate

- **Use your school's online outlets** to communicate your COVID-19 prevention policies to faculty, staff, students and the public, including the strong recommendation that all individuals wear a mask while indoors. IHE may choose to adopt stricter masking and vaccine guidelines than current state and local guidance.
- **Post signs in highly visible locations** (such as building entrances, bathrooms and dining areas) that communicate COVID-19 prevention strategies, such as correct use of [face masks](#), [handwashing](#), and respiratory hygiene.
- **Make sure all students, faculty and staff are aware of and follow LA County's Health Officer Orders.** Identify a key point of contact at your institution who can serve as a liaison to the LA County Department of Public Health. **As of August 1, 2022, updated guidance on COVID-19 case reporting to Public Health requires IHE to report clusters of 3 or more cases of COVID-19 who were on campus at any point within the 14 days prior to illness onset date in a classroom, office, or other pre-defined or identifiable group (i.e., cohort, team/club, etc.). IHE should report the cluster with the information for the cases through SPOT immediately, and no later than 1 business day Please refer to the [IHE ExposureManagement Plan for more information.](#)**

Basic Needs Supports for Students

- **As the COVID-19 pandemic continues**, many students, particularly students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, have juggled their class schedules with employment and/or finding access to resources to help support their families. Additionally, some students with disabilities have had unique challenges in accessing their classes, using support tools and finding the resources they need to stay engaged and on track to a degree, while other students with disabilities found themselves at even greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19 than their peers. In order to be responsive to the current challenges that students are facing, IHE should consider implementing broad-based supports and flexibility that allow students to be responsive to their needs both at home and in class. See [US Department of Education ED COVID-19 Handbook](#) for further discussion.

Equity

- **IHE can create and implement equity-driven strategies** to respond to COVID-19 and mitigate the disparate impacts of the pandemic on your diverse student population. Students enrolled in higher education may face challenges related to balancing coursework and other responsibilities during the pandemic. Students from underserved communities and those with disabilities may have additional needs in order to participate in online learning opportunities. The US Department of Education outlines several steps IHE can take along with information and resources that may be helpful references as IHE explore how to close access gaps for their students and support the effective use of technology in online teaching and learning. See [US Department of Education ED COVID-19 Handbook](#).

International Students

- **International students may have access to different vaccines** authorized by their home country or may not have access to a COVID-19 vaccine at all. The United States is accepting any COVID-19 vaccine currently licensed or authorized for emergency use by the FDA, or any [vaccine listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization](#). The CDC considers a person to be fully vaccinated after they have received all recommended doses of an FDA- or WHO-approved vaccine. It is recommended that IHE align with CDC considerations regarding use of international vaccine products. For information regarding vaccine administration for students vaccinated outside the United States, see current [CDC recommendations](#). Additionally, IHE should plan for situations where they may need to provide quarantine housing and wrap-around services to international students until they are fully vaccinated. Above all, IHE should remain flexible with students.