

Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education Requirements and Best Practices

Updates: 3/11/22

- Updated mask guidance to align with current Health Officer Order
- Weekly asymptomatic screening testing for unvaccinated students is no longer required but is strongly recommended
- Attendance thresholds return to pre-surge levels for both outdoor and indoor Mega Events
- Link added to current CDC recommendations regarding booster information for international students
- Clarified that IHE students who participate in an apprenticeship or internship at an off-campus, non-IHE site must adhere to employer's safety protocols
- Clarification on quarantine and testing exemptions
- Clarification on housing assignments based on vaccine status
- Clarification on internal campus transportation
- Updated considerations and recommendations for performing arts classes and performances

Given the ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and the possibility of more emerging variants of concern, a layered approach to prevention that includes full vaccination with a booster dose, when eligible, good ventilation while indoors, and the availability of well-fitting, highly protective masks when around others in public spaces, especially indoors, remains essential 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 aerosol particles, in the air space.
- **Increased exhalation of respiratory fluids** 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 (IHEs) 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 are different than those for students and visitors. Employers must follow the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the County [Health Officer Order](#). Please note that the directives in the LAC Health Officer Order must be followed when they are more stringent than the Cal/OSHA ETS.

Guidance for Higher Education

- IHEs that host indoor events with more than 1,000 attendees or outdoor events with more than 10,000 attendees must follow [Guidance for Mega Events](#).

Prevent and Reduce Transmission Among the Campus Community

- **Encourage vaccination** of faculty, staff, and students, including booster doses as soon as someone becomes eligible. Vaccines are safe and effective and are the best way to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks on your campus and in the community. Primary vaccine series alone provide very limited protection against infection with the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, while a booster dose can greatly improve that level of protection. 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. IHEs should also consider offering vaccination opportunities to members of the surrounding community as feasible.
 - For more information about how to promote vaccination on your campus, visit CDC's [Vaccine Toolkit for Institutes of Higher Education, Community Colleges and Technical Schools](#).
- **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 (e.g., workers), or to persons whose vaccination status is unknown. Even fully vaccinated persons have a risk of getting infected, and a booster dose can greatly decrease that risk, but masking at all times when indoors and in presence of others 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. Only a few exceptions apply – see the Health Officer Order and the LAC Department of Public Health (DPH) COVID-19 [Masks](#) page for more information.
 - **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 an effective 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.

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 or quarantine 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 Institutions of Higher Education.
- **Tell people who have had close contact** with someone with COVID-19 to get tested right away upon notification and again 5 days after date of last exposure. If they are not up to date on their vaccination status **and have not been infected with COVID-19 in the past 90 days**, they should also be instructed to quarantine at home or in their dorms and not enter any campus buildings, common areas, or dining halls. If they develop symptoms or test positive during their quarantine period, they need to isolate for an additional period of time. Length of quarantine or isolation and requirements for release is described in the [Exposure Management Plan for Institutions of Higher Education](#).
- **IHEs should continue to support case investigation and contact tracing** as directed by LAC Department of Public Health. Note that a group tracing approach that does not require quarantine of potentially exposed individuals is now available to IHE and will be detailed in the Exposure Management Plan mentioned above.
- **IHEs should arrange transportation** for those who need to isolate or quarantine and for them to get tested. IHEs should also provide housing for symptomatic students to isolate and, **where appropriate**, for closecontacts **who need** to quarantine. IHEs should have a plan to ensure that isolated/quarantined students can participate in remote learning, or if their symptoms prevent such participation, that they can access academic support services such as tutoring and advising to assist in the transition to remote learning. IHEs should also develop a plan to meet these students' other basic needs and provide access to mental health support.

Testing for COVID-19

- **IHEs must ensure** that all employees and students, regardless of vaccination status, have access to diagnostic and response testing if they develop symptoms or have been a close contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- **Weekly asymptomatic screening testing is recommended** for all students and staff who are not up to date on their COVID vaccination status, which includes anyone who has not completed a primary COVID-19 vaccine series, and anyone who is fully vaccinated and due for a booster dose but has not yet received it. **Weekly testing is not appropriate for those infected with COVID-19 in the past 90 days.**

Guidance for Higher Education

- 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 policies) implemented for other employees of the off-campus business or facility.
- Students and staff who are exposed to an infected individual are exempt from testing and quarantine only if they are up to date on their vaccines (including having received a booster once eligible or fully vaccinated but not yet booster-eligible) and/or have been infected with COVID-19 within the last 90 days and remain asymptomatic. Please refer to the [Exposure Management Plan](#) for further guidance.
- **Symptom Screening** - Encourage students, faculty, and staff to perform daily health screenings for respiratory infections, including COVID-19, and to stay home or seek medical care for any symptoms identified.

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.
- **Roommates/suitemates** can be considered a household and do not need to wear masks or physically distance when in the unit (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 Shared or Congregate Housing](#) for more recommendations, including how to create and maintain physical distancing in communal living settings.
 - It is recommended that IHEs keep some housing vacant for quarantine/isolation purposes, especially if an IHE has a significant proportion of unvaccinated students. IHEs should have a COVID-19 prevention plan that addresses isolation and quarantining of students.
- **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.

- **If you offer internal campus transportation** such as busses or vans, these are now considered private transportation methods and the federal regulations 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 testing at least once per week for all participants is strongly recommended for activities with increased exertion or voice projection, such as dance, drama, theater, if masks are not worn at all times during indoor practice, rehearsal, and instruction. Testing should be prioritized for participants not up to date on vaccination status.
 - 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 in 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 without masks and the activities include increased exertion (e.g., dance) or vocal projection (e.g., drama, theater). Testing should be prioritized for participants not up to date on vaccination status.

- Routine testing at least once per week is also strongly recommended if activities include singing indoors without masks or physical distancing, or playing wind instruments indoors without modified masks, bell covers, and physical distancing. Testing should be prioritized for participants not up to date on vaccination status.
- 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 starting no more than 72 hours before they begin working together with the performance ensemble until the end of the production and performance schedule. This recommendation is regardless of vaccination status, although testing members of the group who are not up-to-date on vaccination status is the first priority.
- **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 [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 in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.
 - Consider moving classroom and other activities outdoors as feasible.
- **See State [Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#).**

Routine Cleaning

- **IHEs 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. IHEs 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.
- **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. **IHEs may choose to adopt more restrictive masking and vaccine guidelines than current state and local guidance recommends.**
- **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 distancing.
- **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. Be sure to report COVID-19 cases and clusters to the LA County Department of Public Health as required by the [Protocol for COVID-19 Exposure Management in Institutes of Higher Education](#).

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, IHEs 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

- **IHEs can create and implement equity-driven strategies** to respond to COVID-19 and mitigate the disparate impacts of the move to online learning. 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. The US Department of Education outlines several steps IHEs can take along with information and resources that may be helpful references as IHEs 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 IHEs align with CDC considerations regarding use of international vaccine products. **For information regarding vaccine booster doses for students vaccinated outside the United States, see current [CDC recommendations](#)** Additionally, IHEs 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, IHEs should remain flexible with students.