Friday, September 4, 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](#).

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Question for Director of COVID Operations Center Kelly Wolgast: How will I know if a student in my class or lab tests positive for COVID-19?

A: Penn State's [contact tracing process](#) consists of multiple layers of outreach. This process prioritizes getting the COVID-positive individual into isolation. The first layer involves reaching out to the individual who has tested positive for COVID. Next, contact tracers contact those who have been identified by the COVID-positive individual as close contacts. Finally, contact tracers will notify others who might need to know, such as faculty members and instructors via [an email from a "Student Support Services"](#) address via our Maxient system. An example of the notification letter is provided here. We will continue to refine and improve this process as we learn more this semester.

The contact tracing process begins within 24 hours of the University learning of a positive case. Instructors and faculty will be notified that a student in their class has a health-related issue that necessitates their absence from class, unless that students has signed a release allowing for more information to be shared. It is possible, even likely, that a student who has tested positive will notify their professors before the University is able to do so. If a faculty member receives notification from the student prior to receiving formal notification from Penn State, they do not need to contact UHS. The good news is that if a student advises their faculty member directly, then the faculty member will have additional time to work with that student on any adaptions needed to help the student be successful in learning while in isolation or quarantine. Faculty will receive an email when the student can come back to class.

Later this week, the University will be rolling out electronic processes that enable someone to self-identify that they have tested positive for COVID or that they may be a close contact of a COVID-positive individual. This may shorten the amount of time that passes before a faculty member is notified of a positive case in their class.

Q: *Does my classroom or instructional space need to be cleaned if a student in my class is positive or presumed positive for COVID-19?*

 A: Penn State is taking a layered approach to slowing the spread of COVID-19. This approach includes a testing and contact tracing program, universal masking, physical distancing, and enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of spaces on campus. The Office of

Physical Plant has developed enhanced cleaning procedures, which include daily cleaning with EPA-approved disinfectants of general purpose and departmental classrooms, restrooms, instructional labs, and public spaces Monday through Friday. In most cases, if you receive a notification from Student Support Services that a student in your class has been placed in quarantine or isolation, the space in which your class takes place will have already been cleaned and disinfected within the past 24 hours since the student was last in your class. Even if a student contacts you and reports that they are ill and have attended your class on that day, as long as masking and physical distancing were practiced in class, the classroom will be cleaned as part of the daily enhanced cleaning procedures. If the class is one in which students and faculty participate in higher risk indoor instructional activities with potential for increased respiratory transmission (e.g., high intensity physical activity or high intensity breathing activity), such as some kinesiology, physical therapy, singing, music, band, and performance settings or activities, then you should contact your unit's pandemic safety officer to initiate the COVID-19 space closure assessment and reporting process. Of course, if a student is physically sick in your class (e.g., vomits in class) then you should: dismiss the class, direct the student to UHS, and contact your pandemic safety officer for further instructions.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- President Barron shared a message with the Penn State community in advance of the Labor Day weekend, urging faculty, staff, and students to avoid travel and to continue practicing health and safety measures such as wearing a mask and social distancing.

- A new guidance document includes information about what instructors should do if a student in their class has been placed in quarantine or isolation and how to handle student absences.

- Penn State has opened a new COVID-19 testing site for students identified via its contact tracing program as being at potential risk of infection and students who believe they may have been exposed to COVID-19 recently. The HUB Parking Deck testing site will be open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Monday, Sept. 7.

- As movement restrictions due to COVID-19 have increased domestic abuse concerns, a collection of Penn State advocacy and support offices has created the Victim & Survivor Support and Advocacy web resource.

- Photo of the Day: Students in MICRB 202 are outfitted with new masks, face shields, and gloves prior to every lab session.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- Initial testing results released August 28 on Penn State's public COVID-19 dashboard consisted of 14 positive cases from symptomatic testing and 13 positive cases from surveillance testing, for a total of 27 positive test results at the University Park campus for the period from August 21 to 27. The dashboard also was updated Tuesday and is available here.

- University Health Services has completed upgrades and renovations that will allow Penn State to more quickly and effectively diagnose students with coronavirus symptoms. One major element is the Abbott testing equipment, which the University recently installed and validated, now available for use.

- Classes will be held on Labor Day, Monday, September 7. More information about expectations regarding employees' work schedules for that day is available here.

- Operating hours of the Pattee and Paterno Library will expand to 9pm Mondays through Thursdays.

- 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 8, 12:00-1:30 p.m., Assessment for Learning Impact Now
  - Tuesday, September 8, 2:00-4:00 p.m., Engaging Students in a Multi-Audience Classroom for Active Learning

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 plans to resume 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, previous news digests, and pandemic-related University news stories

- 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