

Friday, October 2, 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.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: *I received a notification letter from Student Support Services stating that a student will be unable to attend class in-person from September 23-27. Why does this date range not match the length of Penn State's [quarantine and isolation requirements](#)?*

A: The length of time listed in the notification letter depends on many factors, including when contact tracers got in touch with the student and when the student's symptoms began. Contact tracers, based on the student's report, identify the time frame during which a student must isolate or quarantine and then make a referral to Student Support Services to complete the faculty notification. There can be a day or two of 'lag time' between when a contact tracer speaks with a student and when the notifications are sent to faculty. A student may have been instructed to isolate on 9/22, for example, but the faculty notification letter is not sent until 9/24.

For asymptomatic students who test positive, the 10 days' isolation begins from the date on which the student was tested, but Penn State receives the test results a couple days later. Because asymptomatic students are not asked to isolate until they have a positive result, the timeframe for faculty notifications in these cases will always be less than 10 days. Other students have symptoms, wait a day or two to get tested, get a positive test result, and when contact tracers speak with the student, the student indicates that they have already been isolating for 5 days. In these situations, Student Support Services will often indicate the day the student started to isolate in the letter. Finally, students identified as a "close contact" who need to quarantine will rarely quarantine for a full 14 days because typically, contact tracers do not talk to the student on the day on which they had their last contact with the positive individual.

In summary, the fact that the time frame on the notification letters is sometimes less than 10 or 14 days is an indicator of how long ago the student was exposed or tested positive, and of the lag time between the quarantine/isolation dates being determined and the faculty notification letter being sent.

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Penn State [released its preliminary coronavirus testing results](#) for the period of September 25 to October 1 on its [COVID-19 dashboard](#) today. Among students tested at the University Park campus whose test results have been processed, Penn State received 285 positive results from its on-demand testing and 12 positive results from its random testing program.
- From September 29 to October 2, [walk-up COVID-19 testing for employees](#) who are listed in the University's Return to Work database is available in the basement level of the HUB Parking Deck. This walk-up testing is voluntary and does not replace mandatory surveillance testing. Depending on need and what is learned during the employee testing this week, the University is exploring continuing employee on-demand testing beyond this week.
- The University is launching a [new webinar series](#) intended for staff and instructors who support the ongoing empowerment, engagement, and well-being of Penn State students. The "Keep Engaging" Fall Webinar Series will be delivered via Zoom, from noon to 1 p.m. every Monday beginning October 5, through November 16. The schedule is available at keep-teaching.psu.edu/webinars.
- Any student who feels sick and has symptoms of COVID-19, or is concerned about COVID-19 exposure, is [strongly encouraged to stay home](#) and contact University Health Services, their campus health center, or a primary care provider immediately to discuss testing options. Each Penn State campus has a plan for testing symptomatic students, either on campus or via a local provider.
- In a special meeting held September 29, the [Penn State Faculty Senate](#) hosted a robust discussion on faculty questions and concerns related to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and engaged in collaborative conversation with members of University leadership.
- Penn State will honor fall 2020 graduates with a [virtual ceremony](#) on Saturday, December 19.
- While the overwhelming majority of students have and continue to comply with Penn State's health and safety policies related to COVID-19, Penn State's Office of Student Conduct has responded to a number of reported violations. Since Aug. 17, the University has issued [1,277 sanctions for violation of various COVID-19-related restrictions and policies](#), including refusal to wear a mask or face covering in public, non-adherence to Penn State's quarantine/isolation guidelines, and failure to observe guidance that strictly moderates gatherings both on and off campus.

- Information for faculty about virtual study groups is available [here](#). Students who regularly participate in study groups may earn higher grades than they would studying alone, and tend to be more actively involved in their courses.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary of Health Rachel Levine are encouraging Pennsylvanians to download [COVID Alert PA](#), a [COVID-19 exposure notification app](#) designed to help fight the spread of the virus.
- Penn State leaders will host a [virtual Town Hall event](#) on Sunday, October 4 at 2 p.m., during Parents & Families Weekend, to answer questions from students and their families about Penn State's return to campus and the University's ongoing response to the coronavirus.
- Gathering feedback from students at an early point in the semester helps gauge students' learning and provides instructors with valuable data for making course adjustments. Students appreciate being asked for feedback, especially when instructors respond with changes to improve learning. Surveying students is one method for gathering feedback. PSU learning surveys specific to the four COVID instructional modes have been created for you to download into your Canvas course to collect student feedback on the learning modes. Click [here](#) for instructions on how to download them into your course. For information about other options for collecting midsemester feedback, see the Schreyer Institute's Midsemester Feedback [page](#).
- Penn State IT has finalized an enterprise-wide service agreement with Top Hat, in September 2020. [Top Hat, currently available for an early adoption program](#), allows instructors and students to communicate and collaborate, create assignments on the fly, and check for knowledge. Instructors can learn how to integrate this tool into their courses for this fall or next spring. More in-depth resources and live training will be available for broader adoption before spring 2021.
- Share a story about your successes in the Fall 2020 semester, in-person, mixed, or remote! We're looking for stories from instructors, students, and staff. Your experiences can help motivate and inspire others and generate new ideas that benefit the Penn State community. You may also recognize someone who you think is doing great work. You can find the form [here](#), which we encourage you to distribute within your department.
- The [September 23 virtual Town Hall event](#) hosted by President Eric Barron and University leadership to discuss Penn State's ongoing response to the coronavirus is now available to view online at <https://LiveEvents.psu.edu>.

Individuals who watched the event are encouraged to fill out this anonymous [survey](#).

- Please check [Penn State's COVID-19 dashboard](#) for the latest on-demand testing and random screening results.
- Penn State Human Resources, in partnership with Health Advocate, has announced a [three-pronged approach for the 2020 flu vaccine clinics](#) throughout the commonwealth. Employees can choose one of three options to get a flu shot.
- [Faculty can still submit questions](#) related to Penn State's return to classrooms this fall. Questions may be submitted [here](#).
- Professional development and training opportunities are available to faculty. [Upcoming webinars for instructors](#) at all Penn State campuses include:
 - Monday, October 5, 12:00-1:00 p.m., [Engaging Students through Empowerment](#)
 - Wednesday, October 7, 2:00-3:00 p.m., [Reading and Interpreting the COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

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