

Friday, April 9, 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.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Q: *How well do the COVID-19 vaccines work against the B.1.1.7 variant?*

A: The B.1.1.7 variant of SARS-CoV-2 was recently discovered in our local community. [B.1.1.7 spreads more quickly and easily than other variants](#), and to help mitigate the impact of transmission in our campus communities, Penn State is strongly encouraging all students, faculty, and staff to sign up and get a vaccine as soon as they are eligible to receive one. All three vaccines that are available in the United States are effective against this variant.

Q: *I have a student who says they are self-quarantining due to suspected close contacts, but they have not made an official report to the University. How should I advise them?*

A: To limit community spread and transmission of COVID-19, any student who suspects or has confirmed that they are a [close contact](#) of an infected individual [must self-quarantine](#), and is strongly encouraged to [self-report by filling out Penn State's contact tracing referral form](#), or by calling Penn State Contact Tracing at [814-863-8800](#). Penn State Contact Tracing will review the information and contact the student.

Though they cannot require it, instructors should strongly encourage students to self-report, to allow the contact tracing process to begin. In addition, any faculty or staff member may refer directly to contact tracing using the link above. To encourage students to engage in responsible behavior, instructors are encouraged to treat such absences as unavoidable under [Senate Policy 42-27](#).

If a student is determined to have met the standard for a close contact, the student will be provided quarantine support and guidance, and their in-person instructors will be notified in [accordance with standard processes](#). Not every reported situation meets the standard for a close contact. In those cases, students will be advised to continue with normal activities following all safety protocols, and instructors will not be notified.

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.
- The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and Pennsylvania Department of Health [announced](#) that a [Regional Vaccination Clinic \(RVC\) will open Friday \(April 9\) inside the Bryce Jordan Center \(BJC\)](#) on Penn State's University Park campus.
- Researchers from the Penn State College of Medicine report that social distancing and lockdowns due to COVID-19 [may have affected clinical researchers' ability to finish trials](#).
- [Penn State will award cash grants to more than 23,000 students](#) under federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated to the University from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund II, part of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA).
- Recently retired Penn State Health executives [returned to help with community vaccination efforts](#).
- In this article, Penn State faculty offer [tips for avoiding burnout](#) during the pandemic.
- [For a small group of people who have had COVID, symptoms can persist for months](#) and range from mild to incapacitating. Physicians at Penn State Health discuss the symptoms they see, who is susceptible to being a "long hauler," and when people should call a doctor about ongoing symptoms.
- Four faculty and staff in the College of Information Sciences and Technology co-authored an article, published in EDUCAUSE Review, that examined technology-based teaching [practices that have emerged in higher education during the pandemic and have been shown to improve student engagement](#).

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- A team including researchers from Penn State has found that approximately [40,000 children in the U.S. may have lost a parent to COVID-19](#) since February 2020.
- [Penn State is strongly encouraging all students, faculty, and staff to sign up to get a vaccine as soon as they are eligible to receive one](#). Phase 2, which extends vaccine eligibility to all Pennsylvanians age 16 or older, will begin on April 19.
- [Spring 2021 Holiday/Special Events Testing Schedule](#)

- Saturday, April 17: no testing at Pegula Ice Arena or Beaver Stadium (Hintz Family Alumni Center and 101 N. Atherton St. open as usual for walk-up and random testing, respectively); testing at the Commonwealth Campuses remains unchanged.
 - Friday, May 7: no random testing (all campuses); one walk-up testing site open (Pegula Ice Arena).
 - Saturday, May 8: no random testing (all campuses); no walk-up testing.
- 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. Walk-up COVID-19 testing hours at the University Park campus will continue as follows:
 - Walk-up testing at the Hintz Family Alumni Center will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
 - Testing availability will change on the dates listed above. More information is available [here](#).
 - [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