

Friday, December 3, 2021

News for Faculty and Instructors: Penn State and COVID-19

This weekly email is designed to provide faculty and instructors with Penn State's pandemic-related news and updates. Watch for these emails on 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 2021 Resources"](#) webpage.

QUESTIONS FROM FACULTY

Q: Should I be worried about the new omicron coronavirus variant?

A: According to Matthew Ferrari, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics, omicron contains more mutations in more locations of the genome than any of the previous SARS-CoV-2 variants. However, there is [no evidence yet that the severity of disease that omicron causes is any worse than delta](#), because we haven't seen enough cases yet. According to Ferrari, all indications are that current vaccines and boosters are effective against omicron, although we don't yet know whether they are less effective than for delta.

Q: *Has my proof of vaccination been verified?*

A: Earlier this week, employees whose proof of vaccination has been verified by the University received an email confirmation. If you did not receive this email, or if you are unsure whether your vaccination status has been verified, you can check your status [here](#). If you are not verified, it's easy to GET verified! Simply upload your proof of vaccination to the University's [Salesforce Health Cloud](#).

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- The University will rely on existing Penn State policies and Human Resources procedures, including potential disciplinary actions, that are already in place for individuals on campuses covered by the federal contractor mandate who do not receive an approved accommodation or receive their final vaccine dose by January 4. Because the OSHA Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) has an option for weekly COVID-19 testing in lieu of vaccination, employees at locations covered by the OSHA ETS will not be subject to potential sanctions for not getting vaccinated, provided they comply with testing requirements. Click [here](#) for further details about compliance processes.
- Penn State leaders encourage the community to take health and safety precautions over the winter break. The U.S. government has imposed travel restrictions from eight southern African countries. Travelers, whether traveling for University purposes or personal reasons, should [prepare for the possibility of](#)

[disrupted travel plans](#). Employees planning University-affiliated international travel must follow the University's travel guidance and request travel via the Travel Safety Network at least 30 days in advance. Employees are expected to return to the U.S. by their approved return date and extended periods of work from outside the U.S. are not permitted. While minor travel delays can be accommodated, those unable to return will be placed on unpaid leave until they return to the U.S. More information on remote work outside of the U.S. is available [here](#).

- The University has announced a [continuation of all current guidance on work arrangements](#) for Penn State employees during the spring 2022 semester. During the upcoming spring semester, faculty will continue to provide in-person instruction. The "work adjustments" process for faculty to request remote instruction for health-related reasons concluded Oct. 29. If a faculty member has not submitted an application and experiences a significant change in their medical condition or the condition of an immediate family member, they should contact their Human Resources strategic partner to discuss next steps.
- With Penn State's return to on-campus teaching, learning, and working during the 2021-22 academic year, the University has updated its [guidelines for students, faculty, and staff in the event that normal campus operations are disrupted due to weather](#). In the event of a change in normal campus operations, in-person courses cannot be moved to a synchronous remote meeting per Faculty Senate Policy 45-00, due to the fact that all students, faculty, and instructors may not have the same access to University facilities and resources or may have other commitments such as child care.
- All faculty, including those who are working remotely, must update their vaccine card if they have indicated that they are vaccinated. Vaccine cards can be uploaded to the [Salesforce Health Cloud](#). All faculty must do to determine whether their vaccine card has been uploaded is click on this link. Notification is instant.
- [Wellness efforts continue across Penn State](#), from individual courses to administrative and academic units.
- A study led by researchers at Stanford and Arizona State Universities with collaborators at Penn State and Harvard Universities is examining the [impact of pandemic-driven school closures on sibling dynamics](#) among Latinx school-aged children in the U.S.
- Penn State's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) will be updated [twice weekly](#), on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the fall semester.

VACCINATION MANDATE RESOURCES

Many faculty members who indicated they are vaccinated have not yet uploaded their vaccination card. Even if you're fairly certain that you uploaded your vaccine card to Salesforce, please check to be sure by visiting [Salesforce Health Cloud](#). If you do not have a vaccine card uploaded into Salesforce, you will be considered out of compliance with the vaccine mandate.

Apply for a religious accommodation at <https://affirmativeaction.psu.edu/covid-19-information/>. More information is available [here](#).

Apply for a medical/disability-based accommodation at <https://hr.psu.edu/sites/hr/files/COVID19MedicalDisabilityAccommodationRequestForm.pdf>. More information is available [here](#).

Information on where to find a vaccine provider can be found [here](#).

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- Penn State students in need of financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic can now apply for a [fall 2021 emergency financial aid grant](#) from the University's Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) III allocation.
- In alignment with the recent announcement from the White House on federal vaccination requirements, [all Penn State employees at all locations are now subject to a federal COVID-19 vaccination requirement](#) – either the federal contractor mandate or the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) mandate – under an executive order from President Biden.
 - At this time, Penn State has determined that the federal contractor vaccination requirement applies to individuals working at, or affiliated with, nine campuses: Altoona, Behrend, Berks, Brandywine, DuBois, Fayette, Harrisburg, Schuylkill, and University Park, including Penn State Extension employees. This has also been extended to Penn State College of Medicine in Hershey and at University Park. There is no option to test out of the federal contractor mandate.
 - The OSHA Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) on Vaccination and Testing, which applies to employers with 100 or more employees, impacts employees at all other Penn State locations. Employees covered under the OSHA requirement must receive their final dose by January 4 or test weekly for COVID-19 in the University's testing protocol.
- The University has updated COVID-19 testing schedules and operating hours for both campus health services and the COVID-19 call center. For employees required to test this fall, the University has set defined dates for them to complete

their COVID-19 test prior to the winter break: Saturday, December 1 to Tuesday, December 7; and Wednesday, December 8 to Tuesday, December 14.

- Drop-in testing at the White Building will remain available during the winter break, but will be closed or have modified hours on some days. The full schedule 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 ["University Status" page](#) and [updated FAQs](#) regarding on-campus work and learning
- Penn State's ["Keep Teaching"](#) and ["Keep Learning"](#) websites, including many [instruction-related FAQs](#)
- Penn State's [COVID-19 dashboard](#)
- Previous issues of this [Digest](#)
- The [Office of Human Resources COVID-19 information site](#) and ["Return to Work on Campus"](#) resource site
- 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