

Friday, February 18, 2022

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 2021-2022 Resources"](#) webpage.

QUESTION FROM FACULTY

Q: *How do I request an extension of my probationary period due to COVID-19?*

A: April 1 is the deadline for tenure-line faculty in the penultimate year of their probationary period to accept a one-year extension to their probationary period due to COVID-19. By completing the online form "[Confirmation of Extension of the Probationary Period Due to COVID-19](#)," the faculty member's probationary period will be extended by one year. Detailed information is available [here](#).

LATEST NEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACULTY

- Congratulations to the 22 faculty who have been named [distinguished professors for 2022!](#)
- After being held in a virtual format in 2021, THON Weekend will take place in-person this year, with [new COVID-19 protocols in place](#) to support the health and safety of all dancers, families, spectators and volunteers. All Penn State students or staff who wish to have access to the event floor or mezzanine level — including all dancers and THON volunteers — are required to be fully vaccinated. All dancers and THON committee volunteers are also required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test dated Feb. 16 or later. Spectators who plan to watch from the stands inside the BJC are required to present either proof that they are fully vaccinated or a negative COVID-19 test to gain entry to the venue. Masking will be required for all individuals while inside the BJC, regardless of vaccination status.
- Faculty and staff who have received their booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccine are [strongly encouraged to share that information](#) with the University by uploading an image of their vaccine card into Penn State's [SalesForce Health Cloud](#).
- College of Medicine investigators will collaborate with health systems in Pennsylvania to examine [how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected health outcomes among pregnant women](#) and their children.

VACCINATION MANDATE RESOURCES

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](#). Those who have received two shots are urged to get a booster if eligible.

KEY REMINDERS FOR FACULTY

- The Big Ten/National Wellness Action Alliance, an action collaborative comprised of faculty from each of the Big Ten universities and the University of Kentucky, is bringing together national experts for the new **Wellness Wednesday Webinar Series for Faculty and Staff**, a 13-week collection of half-hour sessions designed to help you build skills, knowledge and confidence to handle stress, optimize health and well-being in yourself and your students, and bring about meaningful change to promote cultures of wellness across your communities. Please click [here](#) to see a list of the sessions and to register.
- As part of its ongoing efforts across many channels to expand Americans' access to free COVID-19 testing, the Biden-Harris Administration is requiring insurance companies and group health plans to cover the cost of over-the-counter (OTC), at-home COVID-19 tests, so people with private health coverage can get them for free starting January 15th. CVS Caremark prescription coverage, a component of Penn State's Aetna health care plans, will now cover the cost of OTC COVID-19 at-home test kits for those employees and their families enrolled in a Penn State health plan. Read the full article [here](#).
- **A message to faculty and instructors from Penn State Contact Tracing and Student Support Services.** Since Fall 2020, Student Support Services has been emailing faculty to alert them that a student in their class is not permitted to attend in-person classes due to isolation or quarantine. Within that notification is a date when the student can return to class safely. Students' isolation and quarantine timeframes are subject to change based on symptoms and test-out options. Presently, faculty may be receiving multiple email updates on one student. Because of the changes in the CDC guidelines that have resulted in a significant increase in Q/I date changes, we are adjusting our processes to notify faculty when a student may not attend class and when they are able to return, as outlined below:
 - Faculty and advisers will continue to receive an initial email from Student Support Services with the most conservative date that a student may return to class as determined by Penn State Contact Tracing.

- If applicable, Contact Tracing will send students emails providing earlier dates on which they can "resume regular activities" if their dates change for some reason (e.g., changes in symptoms, test-out options). Students will be asked to forward this email to their instructors before they return to class. This email will originate from contacttracing@psu.edu. It is appropriate for you to ask to see their email from Contact Tracing if they return to class and did not forward it to you in advance.
 - This new process will streamline communication to faculty and decrease confusion and allow Student Support Services to spend more time reaching out to support students in isolation or quarantine. If there are any concerns regarding notifications received, faculty may contact Student Support Services to get clarification about a student's dates.
 - An updated "Student Quarantine & Isolation" reference guide for faculty has been posted [here](#).
- The Flexible Work Arrangements University Implementation team is drafting a [new policy on staff flexible work arrangements](#) to be implemented University-wide.
 - At University Park, [drop-in and by-appointment asymptomatic COVID-19 testing is available seven days a week at White Building for students](#) living on or near campus. At all Commonwealth Campuses, student tests will be distributed by the student health center or designated office, or ordered through the mail via the Vault Health mail-in test kit.
 - [Students, faculty, staff, and visitors are urged to wear well-fitting, multi-layered masks](#) in accordance with the latest University and federal guidance.
 - This [article](#) contains a list of COVID-19-related resources for employees.
 - [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