

Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education Requirements and Best Practices

On July 17 and 22, the Los Angeles County (LAC) Health Officer issued a revised [Health Officer Order](#) requiring the use of face masks in all indoor public settings, including public and private businesses. Given the increase in community transmission of COVID-19 and the growing presence of the more easily spread Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, masking indoors, regardless of vaccination status, is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus spreads more easily than strains of the virus that circulated in LAC in the past.

Below is a summary of requirements and best practices for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) to enhance safety for their students, faculty, staff, and communities, and lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission on their campuses. In addition to this information, please remember:

- Requirements for employees are different than those for students and visitors. Employers must follow the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the County Health Officer Order. Please note that the directives in the LAC Health Officer Order must be followed when they are more stringent than the Cal/OSHA ETS.
- IHEs that host indoor events with more than 5,000 attendees or outdoor events with more than 10,000 attendees must follow California State [Guidance for Mega Events](#) and local LAC [Best Practices for Large Events](#).

Please be sure to read and follow the [general guidance for businesses](#). The best practices below are intended to supplement the general guidance.

Prevent and Reduce Transmission Among the Campus Community

- **Encourage vaccination** of faculty, staff, and students. Vaccines are safe and effective and are the best way to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks on your campus and in the community. Consider offering COVID-19 vaccination clinics on-campus, promoting vaccine trust and confidence among the school community, and adopting policies that strongly encourage or require all faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated. IHEs should also consider offering vaccination opportunities to members of the surrounding community as feasible.
 - For more information about how to promote vaccination on your campus, visit CDC's [Vaccine Toolkit for Institutes of Higher Education, Community Colleges and Technical Schools](#).
- **Follow face mask rules** in compliance with the Los Angeles County [Health Officer Order](#). The purpose of continued masking is to prevent transmission to persons with higher risk of infection (e.g., unvaccinated or immunocompromised persons), to persons with prolonged, cumulative exposures (e.g., workers), or to persons whose vaccination status is unknown.



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- **All individuals**, regardless of vaccination status, are required to wear an appropriate face mask over the nose and mouth while indoors. Only a few exceptions apply – see the Health Officer Order and the LAC Department of Public Health (DPH) COVID-19 [Masks](#) page for more information.
- **For outdoor classes**, meetings, activities, or events, attendees, especially those who remain unvaccinated, should consider wearing masks if they are not able to distance, there is crowding, and/or activities are taking place that create higher risk for transmission (singing, shouting, chanting, playing wind instruments).
- **Be supportive** of students, faculty, and staff who choose to wear a mask for any reason, whether as a personal choice or because they have a medical condition that places them at increased risk of severe illness.
- **Physical distancing** in lecture halls, specialized classroom settings, and all other indoor spaces remains an effective mitigation strategy and is recommended if it does not interfere with campus operations. Increasing physical distance between individuals is strongly recommended in settings where masking cannot be maintained, such as in dining halls.

Screening, Contact Tracing, & Quarantine/Isolation

- **Have students, faculty and staff members screen themselves daily for symptoms** before entering classes and other campus activities and ask those living off campus not to come to campus if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they are under isolation or quarantine orders.
- **Anyone with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) (regardless of vaccination status) should get [tested](#)** for COVID-19 and be immediately [isolated](#) away from others. If they test positive, they need to remain isolated from others for minimum 10 days from symptom onset and until fever-free for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) along with improvement of other symptoms.
- **Tell people who have had close contact** with someone with COVID-19 to get tested and quarantine at home or in their dorms and not to enter any campus buildings, common areas, or dining halls for 10 days. If they test positive during their quarantine period, they need to isolate for an additional 10 days from symptom onset or, if asymptomatic, from the date of the positive test. They should follow LAC DPH isolation and quarantine guidelines as described in the [Exposure Management Plan for Institutions of Higher Education](#).
- **IHEs should continue to support case investigation and contact tracing** as directed by LAC Department of Public Health.
- **IHEs should arrange transportation** for those who need to isolate or quarantine and for them to get tested. IHEs should also provide housing for symptomatic students to isolate and for close contacts to quarantine. IHEs should have a plan to ensure that isolated/quarantined students can participate in remote learning, or if their symptoms prevent such participation, that they can access academic support services such as tutoring and advising to assist in the transition to remote learning. IHEs should also develop a plan to meet these students' other basic needs and provide access to mental health support.

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- **IHEs should also ensure that faculty and staff that are positive COVID-19 cases or close contacts have flexible work arrangements** (if able to work) and sick leave (if unable to work).

Testing for COVID-19

- **IHEs must ensure** that all employees and students, regardless of vaccination status, have access to diagnostic testing if they develop symptoms or have been a close contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- **During periods of increased community transmission**, it is recommended that IHEs implement an asymptomatic screening program.
 - Implement entry screening testing at the beginning of the term for all individuals.
 - Provide serial screening testing for asymptomatic individuals without COVID-19 exposure to reduce transmission. Testing at least once per week is recommended. Serial screening is particularly important for all unvaccinated persons on campus and this group should be prioritized. However, IHEs may consider screening fully vaccinated individuals as well if testing capacity allows.
 - Schools without the capacity to implement universal serial testing can still reduce transmission by testing a random sample of students, faculty, and staff. Alternatively, IHEs can implement [pooled testing](#), in which the test is conducted on the combination of samples from multiple individuals.
- **Symptom Screening** - Encourage students, faculty, and staff to perform daily health screenings for infectious diseases, including COVID-19, and to stay home or seek medical care for any symptoms identified.

Reduce crowding, especially indoors

- **In classroom settings**, consider offering large lecture classes online simultaneously to reduce crowded lecture halls by reducing the number of students in classrooms at any given time.
- **In dorms or residence halls**, where possible, assign unvaccinated students to single rooms. Where there is not sufficient supply of single rooms to accommodate all unvaccinated students, it is safer to place individual unvaccinated students with roommates or suitemates who are fully vaccinated, rather than to cohort unvaccinated students together. Surrounding unvaccinated persons with vaccinated individuals provides some degree of additional protection for the unvaccinated.
- **Roommates/suitemates** can be considered a household and do not need to wear masks or physically distance when in the unit (dorm room or suite) unless someone in the household is ill. Otherwise, all residents should wear masks whenever they are in common areas of congregate housing facilities, except when engaged in an activity where masks are obviously not feasible (e.g., while showering, eating, oral hygiene). Refer to CDC [Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing](#) for more recommendations, including how to create and maintain physical distancing in communal living settings.

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- It is recommended that IHEs keep some housing offline for quarantine/isolation purposes, especially if an IHE has a lot of unvaccinated students. IHEs should have a COVID-19 prevention plan that addresses isolation and quarantining of students.
- **In dining halls**, follow DPH Best Practices for [Food and Beverage Service](#). Continue to offer to-go meals for students who prefer not to eat in the dining halls.
- **If you have fitness centers** on campus, follow DPH [Best Practices for Exercising Indoors](#) in your gyms, sports facilities, or fitness centers.
- **If you offer campus transportation** such as busses or vans, remember that [State Guidance on Face Coverings](#) and the LAC [Health Officer Order](#) requires all riders to wear a face mask. Consider opening windows to increase ventilation.
- **Considerations for performing arts classes.** At this time, masks are required indoors at all times, and this includes during performing arts classes, with special exceptions below for individuals in music programs that may include students studying singing and/or playing of wind instruments. Groups of students studying/practicing drama, dance, etc. will need to do so while wearing masks unless the activity occurs outdoors.
- **Additional Considerations for students enrolled in musical performance classes and programs.** Moving rehearsal, practice and instruction to the outdoor setting is strongly recommended, especially when singing and/or playing of wind instruments is occurring.
 - Indoors any individual may rehearse or perform alone in an enclosed practice room without wearing a mask.
 - Any individual student or a group of two students may practice or receive performance instruction in an indoor setting if they are the only students present with an instructor. All three individuals must wear masks at all times unless the musical activity involves singing or playing a wind instrument. The singers or wind instrument musicians may remove their masks while practicing or receiving instruction indoors in the small group setting if the following conditions are met:
 - All three individuals are fully vaccinated; all individuals are tested a minimum of three times per week; all parties maintain a six-foot minimum distance; students playing wind instruments wear modified masks and use instrument bell covers; in addition, it is strongly recommended that the instructor wear a higher level of personal protection, i.e. respirator (N95 or KN95).
 - Larger groups of students may practice and receive performance instruction together in an indoor setting, absent singers and wind instruments, as long as all participants wear masks at all times. The group may include singers and/or wind instruments if the following additional conditions are met:
 - All individuals must be fully vaccinated – students, faculty and other staff. The only permitted exceptions are appropriate medical exemptions.
 - All individuals are being tested at least three times per week.

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- Anyone playing wind instruments must wear modified masks and use instrument bell covers and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from all other persons. They should revert to full face masks when not actively practicing or performing. Water and saliva build up (spit valves) must be emptied into appropriate receptacles only.
- Singers should maintain a distance of at least six feet from others when singing and should put on their masks when they are not actively practicing or performing.
- For live indoor student performances including audiences, all non-performers in attendance must wear masks. Student performances that cannot feasibly be done while wearing a mask are permitted as long as any additional performers and stage crew working in close proximity to musical performers during the live events test twice weekly starting at least 72 hours before they begin working together with the performance ensemble until the end of the production and performance schedule.
- **Considerations for college sports.** Vaccination is strongly recommended for all college sports participants, coaches, and support staff. Teams should consider opportunities to train, practice and compete outdoors rather than indoors whenever possible. Colleges sports teams should follow [NCAA COVID-19 guidelines](#). For games and competitions in indoor settings, during play all spectators, coaches, staff, and any players not actively competing (i.e. on the bench or sidelines) should be masked at all times. Only players who are actively exerting themselves on the court or field of play may remove their masks, as long as other mitigation strategies are being implemented in alignment with NCAA COVID-19 guidelines.

Ventilate

- **Since the virus spreads more readily** between people indoors than outdoors, improving air exchange to reduce the concentration of viral particles can help reduce risk in indoor environments.
 - Continue to maintain your building's HVAC system in good, working order.
 - Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in all working areas.
 - When weather and working conditions allow, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Consider using fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows – position window fans to blow air outward, not inward.
 - Decrease occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.
 - Consider moving classroom and other activities outdoors as feasible.
- **See State [Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments](#).**

Routine Cleaning

- **IHEs should consider developing [routine cleaning plans](#)** that prioritize cleaning high-touch surfaces and areas that are used most frequently and those that entail intensive hands-on engagement with equipment, such as in CTE or STEM labs. IHEs should provide individuals responsible for the cleaning and disinfection of facilities with the appropriate PPE.

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Support Handwashing & Respiratory Etiquette

- **Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizer** (that contains at least 60% alcohol) at entrances, and outside classrooms, communal bathrooms and dormitories with signage promoting use.
- **Encourage frequent handwashing** and respiratory etiquette by ensuring sink functionality, along with ample supplies of hand soap, tissues, and other essentials for proper [hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette](#) are maintained throughout the campus.

Communicate

- **Use your school's online outlets** to communicate your COVID-19 prevention policies to faculty, staff, students and the public, including the requirement that all individuals must wear a mask while indoors.
- **Post signs in highly visible locations** (such as building entrances, bathrooms and dining areas) that communicate COVID-19 prevention strategies, such as required correct use of [face masks](#), [handwashing](#), and distancing.
- **Make sure all students, faculty and staff are aware of and follow LA County's Health Officer Orders.** Identify a key point of contact at your institution who can serve as a liaison to the LA County Department of Public Health. Be sure to report COVID-19 cases and clusters to the LA County Department of Public Health as required by the [Protocol for COVID-19 Exposure Management in Institutes of Higher Education](#).

Basic Needs Supports for Students

- **As the COVID-19 pandemic continues**, many students, particularly students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, have juggled their class schedules with employment and/or finding access to resources to help support their families. Additionally, some students with disabilities have had unique challenges in accessing their classes, using support tools and finding the resources they need to stay engaged and on track to a degree, while other students with disabilities found themselves at even greater risk for serious illness from COVID-19 than their peers. In order to be responsive to the current challenges that students are facing, IHEs should consider implementing broad-based supports and flexibility that allow students to be responsive to their needs both at home and in class. See [US Department of Education ED COVID-19 Handbook](#) for further discussion.

Equity

- **IHEs can create and implement equity-driven strategies** to respond to COVID-19 and mitigate the disparate impacts of the move to online learning. Students enrolled in higher education may face challenges related to balancing coursework and other responsibilities during the pandemic. Students from underserved communities and those with disabilities may have additional needs in order to participate in online learning. The US Department of Education outlines several steps IHEs can take along with information and resources that may be helpful references as IHEs explore how to close access gaps for their students and support the effective

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use of technology in online teaching and learning. See [US Department of Education ED COVID-19 Handbook](#).

International Students

- **International students may have access to different vaccines** authorized by their home country or may not have access to a COVID-19 vaccine at all. The United States is accepting any COVID-19 vaccine currently authorized for emergency use by either the FDA or any [vaccine listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization](#). The CDC considers a person to be fully vaccinated after they have received all recommended doses of an FDA- or WHO-approved vaccine. While IHEs are not required to follow this guidance, it is strongly recommended. Additionally, IHEs should plan for situations where they may need to provide quarantine housing and wrap-around services to international students until they are fully vaccinated. Above all, IHEs should remain flexible with students.

