COVID UPDATE TO CAMPUS

August 17, 2022

As we begin the fall semester, we will continue to follow the plan we successfully implemented in spring semester and utilized throughout the summer. Our public health team continues to monitor COVID-19 data and coordinate with state, local and UNC officials and colleagues. Our situation is much improved since the early stages of COVID and the Delta variant. With a decrease in illness and outcome severity and the tools now available, we have adapted our response to the current stage of the pandemic – moving from crisis response to disease management.

On August 15, Gov. Roy Cooper ended the public health emergency for COVID-19. The University is now following the NCDHHS approach – Moving Forward Together: The Next Phase of North Carolina’s COVID-19 Pandemic Response. Though COVID will be with us for the foreseeable future, we now have the tools and knowledge to manage and live with the virus. We also recognize mental health is an essential component of overall health and well-being. A vibrant campus life experience, full of unique opportunities, is vital to student and employee health, success and retention.

COVID-19 is still with us, but vaccines and more effective treatments are now available. Our campus community has a significant level of immunity due to vaccination and infection-induced immunity. While this immunity does not stop infection or reinfection, it is the best defense against severe illness. The Omicron variant is more transmissible, but less virulent than the previous Delta variant. We can expect to have case surges, but cases involving hospitalization and severe illness are not expected to surge in a similar fashion.

Below are some key aspects of our fall plan with additional details found at Community Expectations.

- If you have these symptoms identified by the CDC, do not attend work or class, and contact your medical provider. Students should fill out the COVID-19 Self Reporting Form in Pirate Port and notify their instructor. Employees should notify their supervisor and refer to isolation and quarantine guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Direct any questions regarding quarantine and isolation guidance to employeehealthcovid@ecu.edu. Employees will need to use sick and/or vacation leave for any absences related to COVID-19.
- Vaccines are encouraged and widely available to students and employees through Student Health Services. Employees can be vaccinated through the ECU Pharmacy, their personal physician or other local pharmacies.
- In accordance with UNC System guidance, masks remain optional except in limited situations in health care and laboratory settings based on infection control and lab safety plans. In accordance with CDC guidance, face coverings are still required to be worn for five (5) days after returning from quarantine or isolation. For those wanting a high quality
mask, the CDC website provides a search function to help identify local retailers providing free N95 masks. If you are more comfortable continuing to wear a mask in indoor settings, then you are encouraged to do so. Let’s continue to treat each other with respect as we make individual choices regarding precautions against COVID-19.

- There are no limitations on gatherings.
- With the displacement of the Delta variant by the far more transmissible Omicron variant, surveillance testing and contact tracing are no longer effective control measures and have been discontinued.
- Symptomatic testing for students is available through Student Health Services and employees can use home test kits or contact their personal physician.

ECU administrators are also monitoring the monkeypox outbreak and coordinating with state, local and UNC System public health officials and colleagues. Monkeypox is a rare disease caused by infection with the monkeypox virus and is in the same family as smallpox. While symptoms are similar to smallpox, monkeypox is typically milder and rarely fatal. Monkeypox can spread to anyone through close, personal, often skin-to-skin contact. Symptoms often begin with a flu-like illness accompanied by a rash, which may look like pimples or blisters. Additional information is available on the NC DHHS and CDC websites.

Welcome back to a new and exciting semester. Thank you for your continued efforts to stay healthy and to keep our community safe.
COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Pirates Moving Forward Together: The Next Phase of ECU’s COVID-19 Pandemic Response

During the first several months of the pandemic in early 2020, little was known about this novel virus and there were no vaccines and limited treatments available. Health care capacity was being stretched to its breaking point and we were all asked to help protect our community and support our healthcare colleagues by wearing masks and social distancing.

In late 2020 and early 2021, COVID vaccines became available to the public. As community vaccination rates increased and the infected recovered and acquired immunity, hospitals and healthcare facilities were seeing fewer cases and less severe illness. ECU and other UNC institutions began to relax their mask mandates, gathering restrictions and COVID testing requirements. While testing and vaccines are still available on campus, most students, faculty, and staff have already received their vaccination series, including boosters. With the change in outcome severity and the tools now available, we can adapt our response to the current stage of the pandemic – moving from crisis response to disease management.

On August 15, Gov. Roy Cooper ended the public health emergency for COVID-19. Certain human resources flexibilities that have been provided during the public health emergency ended on Aug. 15 or will end on Aug. 31, 2022. The University is following the NCDHHS plan – Moving Forward Together: The Next Phase of North Carolina’s COVID-19 Pandemic Response. Though COVID will be with us for the foreseeable future, we now have the tools and knowledge to manage and live with the virus.

Core Principles

Empowering Individuals: As ECU students, faculty, and staff seek to return to their normal routines, they will need to make informed decisions on how to best protect themselves. Pirates can decide for themselves whether to get vaccinated and/or wear masks in public settings. With COVID testing, including at home testing, being widely available, ECU is also shifting away from providing large scale surveillance testing.

Following the data: ECU officials will continue to monitor COVID-19 data and collaborate with local, state, and federal partners. ECU dashboard updates were discontinued in early May 2022, but local, state, and national dashboard information is still available on the COVID-19 website.

Testing and Vaccination: There are ample testing supplies and vaccine available on campus. COVID-19 testing will be available to symptomatic or exposed students at Student Health Services. Students with questions or concerns should contact gotquestions@ecu.edu. Testing resources for employees remain available through their primary care providers, local pharmacies.
and home test kits. Employees seeking quarantine or isolation guidance should contact Employee Health by emailing employeehealthcovid@ecu.edu. Guidance will be provided on an individualized basis.

COVID-19 vaccinations, including boosters, are encouraged and will be available for students, at Student Health Services and local pharmacies; faculty and staff may acquire vaccines and boosters at ECU pharmacy, local pharmacies or their personal physician.

**Face Coverings:** Though there is no longer a face covering mandate in most spaces on campus, including classrooms, those who are more comfortable wearing a face covering are encouraged to do so. Please continue to treat each other with respect as we make individual choices based on personal circumstances regarding precautions against COVID-19.

- Face coverings are now optional in most indoor spaces.
- Face coverings are required in the following **indoor situations:**
  - Health care settings based on infection control plans and identified with signage, and
  - Research laboratories based on lab safety plans and identified with signage.
  - In accordance with CDC guidance, face coverings are still required to be worn for five (5) days after returning from quarantine or isolation.

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**Operational Preparedness**

**Vaccination and Testing**

Vaccinations and boosters are strongly encouraged as the best defense against severe illness. Students will continue to have access to free COVID-19 testing on campus through Student Health Services. Faculty and staff who wish to be tested or who are symptomatic should contact their personal physician’s office or test via home test kit. If you test negative for COVID-19 using a home test kit, the CDC recommends testing again 1 to 2 days after your first test.

**Symptoms and Exposure**

- When sick, stay home from work or class. Before coming to work or class, self-assess your health for [these symptoms identified by the CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html). If you have symptoms, do not attend work or class, and contact your medical provider. Students should fill out the COVID-19 Self Reporting Form in Pirate Port and notify their instructor; employees should notify their supervisor and direct any questions regarding quarantine and isolation guidance to employeehealthcovid@ecu.edu.
- Follow all directions given by university officials and public health authorities. This includes directions related to testing and adhering to isolation and quarantine requirements if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have possible COVID-19 symptoms, or have been deemed a close contact of someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
- ECU is following [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) for COVID-19 isolation and quarantine.
• A limited number of isolation and quarantine spaces will be available on campus for students during their isolation/quarantine period if needed.
• In accordance with the state’s Communicable Disease Emergency policy, certain human resources flexibilities that have been provided during the public health emergency ended on Aug. 15 or will end on Aug. 31, 2022. For additional information, see COVID-19 Leave Provisions Ending memo dated Aug. 3, 2022.

Gatherings and Hygiene

• Practice good hand hygiene. Wash hands frequently, for 20 seconds at a time. If soap and water are not readily available, use alcohol-based sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
• Follow signage or requirements when directed. Individual activities and facilities may have more specific requirements based upon the unique risks presented.

Pirates Protect Pirates

These community expectations and all other rules, practices and guidelines ECU has implemented to reduce the risk of COVID-19 are supplemental and in addition to university policies, regulations and rules already in place.

Failure to follow these community expectations or any other university policy or guidance related to COVID-19 health and safety, on or off campus, may lead to administrative and/or disciplinary action. Violations of state or local laws, ordinances or executive orders are also subject to criminal citations or penalties. See the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities COVID-19 webpage for more information about requirements and sanctions for violating community expectations.

Although ECU has instituted reasonable practices to lessen or reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19, ECU cannot guarantee that you will never be exposed to or get sick from the virus, and ECU cannot guarantee a COVID-19-free environment. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic could cause further interruption to academic and campus activities and operations; ECU will adjust as needed and communicate accordingly. We also do not know the long-term effects of COVID-19, and we acknowledge it is possible to contract COVID-19 even when following safety precautions recommended by government authorities, agencies, and university policies and practices.

Updated: August 17, 2022