



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY SENATE  
**FROM:** Faculty Senate Tri-Chairs  
**SUBJECT:** Addressing Fall 2021 Concerns Related to In-Person Instruction  
**DATE:** AUGUST 27, 2021

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### Teaching in Person

For the last month we have been meeting with members of the administration about the return to in-person teaching, especially about mechanisms to request exemptions. We have also been consulting with faculty on the Senate P4 committee, who are expert in infectious disease and epidemiology, to get an independent reading on the safety of in person teaching. We can report the following responses to faculty questions about virus transmission in classroom settings. Bill and Kathleen will both be teaching in person (Vivian is on sabbatical leave).

We also have scheduled a Faculty Senate Seminar for Wednesday, September 1, 4-5 PM, with R. Joy Azikiwe, Executive Director for Human Resources and Chief of Staff; Benoit Dubé, Associate Provost and Chief Wellness Officer; Laura Perna, Vice Provost for Faculty; and Anne Papageorge, Vice President for Facilities and Real Estate Services to answer questions about returning to the classroom: [Addressing Your Fall 2021 Instructional Questions](#). This Seminar will be available to the whole Penn community, though the focus will be on instructional settings.

In general terms, the safety of in-person teaching depends on two factors. First is the vaccination and masking of faculty and students in the classroom. Second is regular testing and contact tracing, linked to decision thresholds or triggers about isolation, quarantine, and lock-down.

### One. Safety in Classroom Settings

The available evidence from the earlier phase of the pandemic as well as more recent data from the Delta variant indicate that there is very low risk of transmission in settings where individuals are vaccinated and masked (see below for references). The infection clusters and hotspots at Penn have almost all been traced to sustained exposure in social settings without masks.

At present over 90% of the Penn community is fully vaccinated, and masking is required in all indoor settings, especially classrooms, so the risk of transmission is very low if protocols are observed. The Provost's Office has developed an [FAQ for instructors](#) that includes information about teaching while masked, classroom protocols, and other resources.

## **Requests for Accommodation**

Faculty may request accommodations including release from in-person teaching in two different ways.

First is a medical accommodation which can be requested through the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Programs, either by calling 215-898-6883 or emailing [oaaeop@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:oaaeop@pobox.upenn.edu). This requires that your doctor completes a form and can be requested for any number of risk factors.

Second is a request for accommodation through your chair or dean for non-medical reasons, such as family members at risk. If that request involves confidential information, you can contact your representative at Human Resources.

There is a separate process for those that cannot take vaccines for religious or medical reasons.

## **Masks**

It is essential that everyone in the classroom be adequately masked.

Information about types of masks can be found at: [Universal Mask and Cloth Face Covering Precautions](#). Detailed information about the exceptions can be found on our [Public Health Guidance page](#). Please visit the [Masking Violations page](#) to report a violation to our masking requirements.

The CDC conducted experiments to assess ways of improving the fit of medical procedure masks and showed that fitting a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask (double masking), and knotting the ear loops of a medical procedure mask and then tucking the extra material close to the face both improved source control and reduced wearer exposure.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7007e1>

## **Ventilation**

An additional component affecting virus transmission in the classroom is the rate of fresh air ventilation, which reduces the potential accumulation of virus in aerosol form. All buildings on the Penn campus satisfy or exceed the ASHRAE standards for fresh air ventilation and have filtration capacity two levels higher than is required to remove virus. You can review the information on these ventilation standards on the [FRES website](#).

For offices, classrooms, and restrooms, the ventilation rates are based on the number or occupants and the square footage of the space, so the ventilation is sufficient at or below those occupancy levels. The occupancy of central pool classrooms can be determined using the Classroom Finder: <https://www.isc-cts.upenn.edu/finder/findermain.asp>. If you have other questions about specific classrooms, you can ask your building or area manager.

<https://www.isc-cts.upenn.edu/finder/quicksupport.asp>

## **Two. Testing, Reporting, and Contact Tracing**

The risk of transmission in the classroom is also a function of the prevalence of the virus on the campus, so it is equally critical that the campus maintain surveillance testing and contact tracing, linked to decision thresholds or triggers about isolation, quarantine, and lock-down.

### **Gateway and screening testing**

As the University recently announced, gateway and regular screening testing has been reinstated. In addition, any member of the Penn community who wants to access a COVID screening test for any reason may participate in volunteer testing. <https://coronavirus.upenn.edu/content/penn-cares-testing-program>

### **Reporting with PennOpen Pass**

PennOpen Pass is now again required to enter campus buildings. The regular reporting of symptoms also helps the University track the virus and provide support if needed. <https://pennopen.med.upenn.edu/>

### **Alert Levels and Decision thresholds**

Last year, the University demonstrated its ability to pivot quickly if the prevalence of the virus changes. Testing and reporting provide the information necessary about alert levels and decisions about when to restrict on-campus activities. <https://coronavirus.upenn.edu/content/alert-levels>

### **Wastewater testing**

The University is continuing the wastewater testing protocol that was piloted last year. This provides an additional level of testing to enhance the response to outbreaks.

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