Southwestern University
Frequently Asked Questions
Faculty and Staff
COVID-19 Policies, Procedures, and Protocols
Fall, 2021

With Dr. Trombley’s message dated August 12, 2021 about the Senior Staff’s decisions for the fall, and the everchanging pandemic landscape, we recognize that our policies must continue to evolve. Our guiding principles in making University policy decisions is to protect the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff and visitors and to follow the guidance of the CDC and other scientific experts. We’ve prepared these FAQ’s for faculty and staff to address as many of the anticipated questions as possible. We will update these FAQ’s if/when our policies change.

Q: What was the basis/guiding factor(s) for the health and safety policy decisions for the fall?
A: The President and Senior Staff looked to CDC guidance and reviewed survey data from other ACS schools regarding our reopening policies. Southwestern’s vaccination rate goal is 90%. When we reach that goal, the University will cease weekly testing of those who are unvaccinated and will consider eliminating or reversing other health and safety protocols.

Q: What is the current CDC guidance for fully vaccinated people?
A: The CDC website provides guidance for fully vaccinated individuals.

Q: Is the University requiring that faculty and staff be vaccinated?
A: No. The University strongly recommends all faculty and staff be vaccinated. Submitting your information will help the University determine what the overall vaccination rate is for our campus community. This will be one of the factors used to determine the health and safety protocols for this fall and beyond. Our vaccination rate goal is 90%.

Q: Will the University discipline faculty and staff who have chosen not to be vaccinated?
A: Vaccination is recommended, not required for faculty and staff. The University respects everyone’s decisions regarding their own health. The University will not take disciplinary action against anyone who chooses to not submit their vaccination status to HR, but does encourage and greatly appreciates everyone’s cooperation to submit their information for the overall safety and protection of the campus community. Additionally, it is important that all members of the campus community respect each other’s personal decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccinations.

Q: What are the impacts for faculty and staff who do not wish to submit their vaccination status or have decided not to get vaccinated?
A: There are a number of items that will impact this group of individuals as compared to those who are fully vaccinated:

- The University will consider this group of individuals to be “unvaccinated.”
- Individuals in this group will be subject to mandatory weekly COVID-19 testing starting the week of August 17th and continuing until they are fully vaccinated or the University changes its current policy.
- Mandatory weekly on-campus PCR testing will be conducted by Community Labs and at this time the testing cost will be paid by the University. Specific information about this process will be sent to each individual in this group.
• This group will be required to adhere to all masking, distancing, avoiding crowds, protocols.
• The unvaccinated group will be required to self-quarantine for at least 14-days if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. For staff members, it will be necessary to use sick leave during the self-quarantine period. Faculty members will need to coordinate with the Dean of the Faculty and their Department Chair to ensure that their classes are covered during the self-quarantine period.

Q: Who is included in the “unvaccinated” group that must be tested each week?
A: The testing pool will include all staff and faculty who:
  • disclosed that they are not currently vaccinated
  • chose to not disclose their vaccination status on the self-attestation form
  • received approval for an exemption from vaccination based on religious or medical reasons
  • have had one or both vaccine shots (as required depending on the shot type), but have not surpassed the 14th day after their final shot.

Q: When will the mandated weekly testing begin and how will individuals who will be participating in the testing be notified?
A: It is anticipated that weekly testing for faculty and staff will begin after August 17, 2021. A separate communication will be sent to all faculty and staff who will be participating in the weekly testing to provide details about the schedule and the process.

Q: What if I have a scheduling conflict with the date or time for the weekly mandatory COVID-19 testing?
A: Please contact the HR Office so other options can be discussed prior to your testing date and time. In order to protect the health and safety of our community, “unvaccinated” individuals must be tested each week.

Q: Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine if I choose to do so?
A: Vaccines are widely available, including many CVS, Walgreens, and Randall’s pharmacies and through many healthcare providers.

Q: What if my vaccination status has changed or if I have decided to change my answer(s) on the self-attestation form since I originally reported it to the University?
A: Please provide any changes or updates to your vaccination status to the HR Office as soon as possible. This information will remain confidential, but will also help us maintain an accurate vaccination status for our community as we attempt to reach the 90% vaccination goal. Any individual that becomes fully vaccinated and has met the 2 week waiting period after receiving their last vaccination will no longer be required to be tested on a weekly basis.

Q: Can faculty and staff who are classified as “unvaccinated” get their weekly tests at a different facility that is free?
A: No. At this time, the University is requiring that the weekly testing be conducted through the on-campus testing process with Community Labs. It is important to know that although there are "free" options available throughout the area, the costs associated with the testing is actually charged to the University's insurance plan. Because the University is 'self-funded' we ultimately pay 100% of all processed claims. The cost for all the other options are more expensive than the contracted rate we receive with Community Labs, which the University has decided to pay at this time.
Q: How does a faculty or staff member request an exemption to vaccination based on religious or health reasons?
A: Faculty and staff may request an exemption based on religious or medical grounds by contacting Elma Benavides in Human Resources at ext. 1441 or benavide@southwestern.edu for more information. Once the request has been reviewed and approved, the individual will still need to participate in the mandatory weekly testing process.

Q: If a faculty or staff member has already submitted their self-attestation form indicating that they are not vaccinated or do not wish to disclose their vaccination status, can they still request an exemption to vaccination based on religious or health reasons?
A: Yes. They should contact Elma Benavides in the Human Resources office as noted above.

Q: Is the University requiring masking for everyone?
A: Yes, the University is requiring face masks to be worn indoors by all students, faculty, staff, and visitors on our campus. Masks are not required in outdoor settings. Masks may be removed in private areas such as residence hall rooms, offices, and while dining or drinking. Additionally, the University urges all members of our community to wear masks, practice physical distancing, and avoid gathering in large crowds while they are on and off campus.

Q: What is the University’s vaccination rate goal?
A: We have set a vaccination rate target of 90% for our campus. Vaccination is an important tool available to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the University encourages everyone who is able to get the vaccine. Getting vaccinated not only helps protect you, it protects others as well.

Q: How do you submit your vaccination status to the University?
A: Staff and faculty may submit proof of vaccination or a completed COVID-19 Vaccine: Self-Attestation Form to Cynthia Nguyen, benefits coordinator, in Human Resources by interoffice mail or via email at nguyen@southwestern.edu.

Q: How can members of the campus community monitor our collective progress toward achieving our 90% vaccination goal?
A: This information will be included on our COVID-19 Dashboard on our website.

Q: Will spectators be allowed to attend athletic events this year?
A: The University is not limiting spectators at outdoor sports venues. However, for indoor events, capacity will be limited based on available space to accommodate physical distancing. All attendees are asked to exercise caution by wearing masks at all indoor sporting events and to practice physical distancing.

Q: Why isn’t the University requiring faculty and staff to be vaccinated for COVID-19 prior to returning to work on campus?
A: The University is required to comply with certain federal anti-discrimination regulations that impact the development of policies/procedures/practices for COVID-19 protocols. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) is the federal agency that enforces workplace anti-discrimination laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) and the Rehabilitation Act (which include the requirement for reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination based on disability, and rules about employer medical examinations and inquiries), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (which prohibits discrimination based on race, color,
national origin, religion, disability, and sex, including pregnancy), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (which prohibits discrimination based on age, 40 or older), and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act. The ADA and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are the two major regulations that have guided the University’s decisions related to COVID-19 protocols. The ADA requires that any mandatory medical test of employees be “job related and consistent with business necessity.” Based on this requirement, the University is not requiring employees to have the COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of their employment primarily because the vaccine is not required for them to be able to perform their job duties.

Q: Will the University continue to conduct contact tracing?
A: Yes. The University will continue to utilize contact tracing to identify anyone who has been directly exposed to COVID-19.

Q: Will remote instruction be an available option for faculty?
A: No. All courses will be taught in-person. If a faculty member has a medical reason that prevents them from performing their regular duties in-person, they need to reach out to HR to see if FMLA, ADA or leave of absence without pay applies to their situation.

Q: Is it allowed for a faculty member to teach one course session remotely if they are, for example, out of town for a conference, or may they invite a remote guest lecturer?
A: Yes, leveraging technology for rare one-time events such as remote instruction for conference travel or a remote guest speaker is appropriate. These sessions ideally should be noted on the syllabus.

Q: Are we allowed to provide food at University events?
A: Yes, however, the preference is that food be provided at events that are optional and where outdoor eating options are available for members of our community who are not comfortable eating indoors unmasked.

Q: Are visitors (including guest lecturers) allowed on campus?
A: Yes, visitors are currently allowed on campus. Although they are not required to show proof of vaccination, they are asked to adhere to our health and safety protocols.

Q: Is the University upgrading air filters to efficiently remove particles less than 5 microns in diameter (including aerosols)?
A: Yes. Facilities Management is installing the highest rated Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) filter that each individual air handler can accommodate. The majority of the air handlers in Mood-Bridwell, Smith Library, McCombs Campus Center, Cullen, Fondren Jones, Fine Arts, Robertson, Olin, Prothro, Studio Arts, Perkins Chapel, and Mundy will be upgraded to either MERV-13 or MERV-14 rated filters. The remaining few air handlers in academic and administrative facilities will have MERV-8 rated filters due to the capacity of the air handlers.

Q: Is the University increasing the amount of air circulation from the outside, to dilute indoor air that might contain viral aerosol?
A: Yes. The air quality of all buildings has been increased through the use of upgraded HVAC filters as mentioned above and/or changing filters on a more frequent basis. In addition, the flow of outside air has been increased to the greatest extent possible that will not compromise the space conditioning of any building.
Q: Will updated signage be distributed?
A: On-campus signage will change to be consistent with the latest CDC guidance.

Q: Are there sufficient people with access to information about who is non-vaccinated to ensure that masking and other protocols for such individuals are adhered to?
A: At this time, the University is requiring everyone to wear masks indoors. If this changes, due to privacy reasons, masking will be on an honor system. As a reminder, all individuals who have not submitted their vaccination status, or who have indicated that they are unvaccinated or do not wish to disclose their vaccination status will be considered to be unvaccinated and will be subject to required weekly testing until the University reaches its 90% vaccination rate goal.

Q: Will it be required for students, staff, and faculty members who test positive to report this information?
A: Yes. Faculty and staff will be asked to report a positive COVID test to their supervisor (for staff) or to the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty) and the HR office. The individual should immediately begin a 10-day self-isolation period. The HR office will begin the contact tracing process and communicate with the supervisor of the affected area.

Q: What happens if a faculty or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?
A: It is important for the faculty or staff member to immediately inform the HR office and their supervisor (for staff) or the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty) and begin a 10-day self-isolation period. The supervisor and appropriate Senior Staff member (for staff) and the Dean of the Faculty together with the Department Chair (for faculty) will determine if the faculty or staff member is able to continue to perform their work remotely (if they do not become ill) or whether the University will provide Emergency Related Approved Leave.

Q: What happens if a faculty or staff member who is fully vaccinated has a child who is potentially exposed to someone who has COVID-19 and they are unable to be vaccinated due to their young age, and are being required to self-quarantine by their school or daycare facility?
A: Because the faculty and staff members are fully vaccinated, they should continue to report to work as usual. Given that we are not allowing students to “zoom” into class in quarantine situations, faculty should not switch to remote learning for non-work-related reasons. Both faculty and staff will need to coordinate child care or course coverage as they did prior to the pandemic. If a complicated illness situation arises that could require sustained absence, the faculty member and department chair should reach out to the Dean to develop a plan. Staff members should contact their supervisor and the HR office.

Q: What happens if a faculty or staff member is potentially exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?
A: It is important for the faculty or staff member to immediately inform the HR office and their supervisor (for staff) or the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty). The protocols are different for those who are vaccinated versus those who are not vaccinated based on current CDC guidance which states that fully vaccinated individuals who are potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19 do not need to self-quarantine unless they begin to have symptoms.

- Faculty and staff members who have confidentially provided their vaccination status indicating that they are fully vaccinated to HR may continue to report to work as usual unless they begin to have symptoms. If symptoms begin, then they should immediately begin a 10-day self-isolation and contact the HR department and their supervisor (for staff) or the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty) to receive additional guidance. If the faculty
member is not able to teach, the Dean will work with the Department Chair to develop a plan for course coverage during the illness. Faculty cannot switch to remote instruction without approval from the Office of the Dean of the Faculty. Staff members who become ill should immediately inform the HR office and their supervisor and begin a 10-day self-isolation period. The HR Office will coordinate with the supervisor and the appropriate Senior Staff member to determine if Emergency Related Approved Leave or remote work will be provided. Staff members cannot switch to remote work without approval from their supervisor and the appropriate Senior Staff member. (Note, those faculty and staff members who have requested and been approved for an exemption to vaccination based on religious or medical reasons are included in this protocol).

- If the faculty or staff member is in the group that is considered “unvaccinated,” they should immediately inform the HR office and their supervisor (for staff) or the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty) and begin a 14-day self-quarantine period. The HR Office will coordinate with the supervisor and the appropriate Senior Staff member regarding the staff member’s absence and timekeeping. The Dean of the Faculty will work with the Department Chair to develop a plan for course coverage during the quarantine period. If the faculty or staff member becomes ill, they should immediately begin a 10-day isolation period and contact the HR office and their supervisor (for staff) or the Dean of the Faculty (for faculty). If the faculty member is not able to teach, the Dean will work with the Department Chair to develop a plan for course coverage during the illness. Faculty cannot switch to remote instruction without approval from the Office of the Dean of the Faculty. Staff members who become ill should immediately inform the HR office and their supervisor and begin a 10-day self-isolation period. The HR Office will coordinate with the supervisor and the appropriate Senior Staff member to discuss their absence and timekeeping. In most cases for staff in this group, sick or vacation time will need to be used during their self-quarantine and/or self-isolation period. Staff members cannot switch to remote work without approval from their supervisor and the appropriate Senior Staff member. (Note, those faculty and staff members who have requested and been approved for an exemption to vaccination based on religious or medical reasons are included in this protocol).

Q: What happens if a staff member who is fully vaccinated independently chooses to self-quarantine or otherwise remain at home for any number of days due to their potential exposure to someone with COVID-19?
A: That leave time (vacation if they are not ill, or sick leave if they become ill) should be coordinated with their supervisor in accordance with the use of vacation and sick leave sections of the Staff Handbook.

Q: As a follow-up to the prior question, is remote work possible for staff members in this situation?
A: At this time, the University is not providing remote work as an alternative work arrangement.

Q: Is remote work a possibility for faculty or staff members for the summer or fall?
A: Not at this time. Staff have already returned to work on campus and it is expected that faculty will teach in-person in the fall. This means that work schedules will revert to pre-pandemic schedules.
Q: Are there any exceptions that would allow for the approval of remote work?
A: The rare exception would be for health-related reasons and the staff or faculty member should contact the HR office to determine which formal process best applies to their situation (for example, Family Medical Leave Act leave or Americans with Disabilities Act interactive process).

Q: Do staff have any flexibility regarding their schedules?
A: Yes. The Flextime Schedules program provides staff the opportunity to modify their regular work schedule; however, it is important to note that remote work is not included within this program. For more information, see the Flextime Schedules forms on the HR website.

Q: Will meetings be held in person?
A: Yes. The president has asked all faculty and staff to return to in-person work beginning July 1st for staff and August 14th for faculty, including conducting meetings in person. The University requires masking for all individuals indoors and meetings are limited to 100 (with adequate room for distancing). Virtual meetings or hybrid in-person/virtual meetings may still be conducted as may be needed.

Q: Are there any time limits on in-person meetings?
A: No. Meetings, classes, laboratory work, and events will no longer be time-restricted as long as all attendees remain masked. Regular breaks are encouraged for individuals spending extended hours amongst others.

Q: Is there a maximum capacity for outdoor events?
A: No.

Q: Are there any travel restrictions for faculty and staff?
A: No. There are no restrictions on faculty or staff domestic or international travel other than restrictions imposed by government entities, airlines, or other travel providers.

Q: Are faculty and staff required to submit travel plans to the travel registry?
A: No. This is no longer required.

Q: Has University-sponsored travel for business purposes been reinstated?
A: Yes. Faculty may now use University funds for travel related to teaching, research or professional development in accordance with our regular procedures. Staff whose positions require travel or who have applied and been approved for other work-related travel should follow our regular procedures.
Q: Is it o.k. for a faculty or staff member to ask another faculty or staff member if they have been vaccinated?
A: It is best not to ask that question directly of anyone. Again, faculty and staff members are not required to provide an explanation for why they have or have not received a COVID-19 vaccination. Many individuals will openly disclose their vaccination status to others, which is fine; however, faculty and staff members should not be pressured (or feel pressured) to answer any question regarding their vaccination status. It is important to recognize that there may be fully vaccinated individuals who choose to take health and safety protocols that the University is not requiring of them - avoid assuming that these are unvaccinated individuals. It is also very important to avoid making negative or derogatory comments or non-verbal facial or physical expressions that may be perceived as negative if you learn that someone is not vaccinated (for example, asking why, rolling your eyes, shaking your head back and forth, sighing, etc.)

Q: Will Pirate Bikes be available for the campus community this year?
A: Yes.

Q: Is the campus basically returning to normal operations in the fall?
A: Yes. Here's what students, faculty, and staff can expect when they return to campus in August:
   • Classrooms will return to full occupancy to the extent possible, but will be arranged to have at least 3-feet of distancing between chairs.
   • Classes will be conducted under a fully in-person instruction model, with limited exceptions for faculty members who require accommodations.
   • Residence halls will return to full occupancy.
   • Indoor gatherings will be limited to 100 except for athletic events, common eating areas, and other venues that can accommodate additional occupancy limits while maintaining physical distancing.
   • There are no restrictions for outdoors.
   • Building hours will be restored to pre-pandemic hours.
   • On-campus signage will change to be consistent with the latest CDC guidance.
   • Visitors may return to campus and are asked to adhere to our campus health protocols.
   • Domestic and international travel is allowed in accordance with CDC guidelines and the policies of travel providers.

Note that these plans are subject to change based on public-health conditions. All of our health protocols are subject to change as the pandemic continues to evolve. Please visit the Reopening and Campus Health and Safety section of our website for the most current information and updates.

August 12, 2021