

# COVID-19 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All planning conducted, decisions made, and actions taken by UL System institutions, collectively and individually, shall adhere to the following hierarchy of principles:

1. The health and safety of students, faculty, staff, and our communities are paramount.
2. The continuity of learning and research must be maintained, adapting to fulfill Principle 1 as appropriate and necessary.
3. The financial health and viability of the enterprise must be protected and are dependent upon the fulfillment of Principles 1 and 2.
4. The social, emotional, and economic welfare of our communities must be considered and are dependent upon the fulfillment of Principles 1, 2, and 3.

## **VACCINES/MASKS**

As you know, vaccines remain our most powerful tool to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The vaccines provide substantial protection against the virus, and especially against severe disease, hospitalization, and death. The Pfizer BioNtec COVID-19 vaccine was awarded full FDA approval which triggered the addition of the COVID-19 vaccination to the schedule of required immunizations at all UL System member institutions for entering and continuing students. Like all required immunizations, students shall not be required to comply with the requirement if the student submits a written statement from a physician stating the vaccine is contraindicated for medical reasons or if the student submits a written dissent. Also, like all required immunizations, upon recommendation by the office of public health, unvaccinated students may be excluded from attendance in the event of an outbreak. All entering and continuing students should be notified of the new vaccine requirement as soon as practicable.

CDC guidance recommends that vaccinated individuals wear masks indoors in communities of substantial or high transmission. The entire state of Louisiana is currently classified as high transmission. Students, faculty, and staff shall wear masks in the classroom and indoor public spaces. Additional masking guidance may be implemented at the university as warranted by local conditions.

Each institution should continue to educate and inform students, faculty, and staff regarding vaccine efficacy and safety and provide ample access to vaccination. Widespread vaccination in our communities is a public health imperative. While data from CDC indicate “breakthrough” infection may be significantly more frequent with emerging variants, the personal protection against severe disease and death should be compelling.

Each institution shall establish COVID-19 Vaccine leave to be made available to employees. Such leave will be utilized by employees to receive the vaccine or assist family members in getting vaccinated. Vaccine leave may also be used for employees who experience side effects from receiving the vaccine. Employees who have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccination should be encouraged to do so and use this leave while it is available.

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According to the latest CDC guidance, fully vaccinated people can:

- Participate in many of the activities that they did before the pandemic; for some of these activities, they may choose to wear a mask.
- Resume domestic travel and refrain from testing before or after travel and from self-quarantine after travel.
- Refrain from testing before leaving the United States for international travel (unless required by the destination) and refrain from self-quarantine after arriving back in the United States.
- Refrain from routine screening testing if feasible.

Evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people who do become infected can spread the virus to others. To reduce their risk of becoming infected and potentially spreading it to others: CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people,

- Wear a mask in public indoor settings if they are in an area of substantial or high transmission.
  - Fully vaccinated people might choose to mask regardless of the level of transmission, particularly if they or someone in their household is immunocompromised or at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in their household is unvaccinated. People who are at increased risk for severe disease include older adults and those who have certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, overweight or obesity, and heart conditions.
- Get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Get tested 5 days following a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 10 days after exposure or until a negative test result.
- Isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the prior 5 days or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- Follow any applicable federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations.

People who are immunocompromised should be counseled about the potential for reduced immune responses to COVID-19 vaccines and to follow current prevention measures (including wearing a mask, staying 6 feet apart from others they don't live with, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces) regardless of their vaccination status to protect themselves against COVID-19 until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider.

## TESTING

Testing for COVID-19 infection must be readily accessible to students, faculty, and staff. Institutions will develop mandatory testing policies in on-campus student housing, associated with sanctioned group activities and in other risk-informed applications as dictated by the public health environment.

Vaccination helps provide highly effective protection against severe disease, but may not protect effectively against infection from the Omicron variant. Routine date-informed testing is considered an important strategy in controlling spread.