Navigating Our Classrooms and Student Spaces

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INTRODUCTION

We have turned a page, and while we know the disruption of these past 18 months is not quite over, the Rutgers community is clearly on the road back and we are anticipating an academic year full of excitement and educational challenges.

University life is defined by challenges, surprises, and incredible achievement. It is a formative time for students and a place where faculty excellence is on display. While our academic priorities are underway, know that our many employees within the Rutgers community continue to work tirelessly to ensure everyone’s safety, so that student life can resume as it has every September since 1766!

Rutgers has been leading by example in navigating the pandemic. We have employed all the tools at our disposal to keep our community safe. We have been providing face coverings for every community member, conducting weekly surveillance testing of identified individuals on campus, mandating vaccine for students, making vaccine readily available at all of our campuses, and making the difficult decision not to repopulate too early. The COVID-19 testing statistics, with an infection rate that is a fraction of the overall state rate, are evidence of the success of our approach. As we continue to monitor the public health situation, we are able to update our approach as we repopulate our campuses and buildings.

Our updated strategies, coupled with widespread vaccination and the fundamental understanding of how to co-exist with COVID-19, enable us to repopulate our campuses. While our normal is in fact a “new normal,” different from pre-pandemic, it is nonetheless a vibrant and exciting normal. The university’s remote workforce began its safe return in July, and it is now time to welcome students back on campus! The information provided in this document provides updated guidance on how we will continue to return in a safe and responsible manner.

Information specific to each campus supplements this guide and can be found here for New Brunswick, here for Newark, and here for Camden.

We are looking forward to seeing you in-person on campus this year!
Best practices with respect to human behavior are critical to co-existing with the virus. Wear a face covering (when appropriate), Watch your distance (when around unvaccinated people), and Wash your hands remain effective preventive measures and defenses.

**ACADEMIC SPACE OCCUPANCY**

The Rutgers vaccination mandate, combined with the use of face coverings indoors and as permitted by NJ Executive Order 242, allows full occupancy of classrooms, residence halls, and other areas across campus. Common sense and courtesy should be used when gathering with others, but social distancing is not required.

**CAMPUS EXPECTATIONS**

Students are expected to fully comply with applicable state requirements as well as Rutgers policies, protocols, and guidance related to COVID-19. Failure to do so presents unnecessary risk to our community and may result in disciplinary action.

**CLASSROOMS**

The vaccination mandate, combined with use of face coverings and guidance from the state, allows classrooms, libraries, student centers, and other spaces on campus to be fully occupied.

Faculty are expected to communicate applicable safety protocols to students in their courses, including the required use of face coverings. Faculty will remind students to wear face coverings, should such a reminder be needed. If a student declines to wear a face covering after a reminder, the faculty member should ask the student to leave class and then report the event to the appropriate contact overseeing student conduct.

Food is not permitted in classrooms. Subject to rules that may be posted at individual classrooms, beverages may be consumed provided that face coverings are promptly replaced after taking a drink.

Extensive information regarding masks and face covering can be found on the CDC’s website. Please note that the CDC does NOT recommend using face shields or goggles as a substitute for masks.
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While on Campus

RESIDENCE HALLS
Students in residence halls need not wear face coverings in rooms or suites, but face coverings must be worn in common areas. Visitors in residence halls are limited to fellow Rutgers students, and resident students must be aware of rules specific to their location. Student Life staff and Resident Assistants may be consulted with questions specific to a building.

STUDENT SPACES
Like classrooms, student centers, recreation centers, computer labs, and dining halls will be open to normal capacity to serve students. Face coverings must be effectively used in these areas, although they may be removed while eating and drinking. In public spaces like those listed above, the staff on duty will be responsible for enforcing face covering requirements.

LIBRARIES
Like other student spaces, libraries will be open to normal capacity to serve students and faculty. The general public will not be permitted in Rutgers libraries. Face coverings must be effectively used in all areas of the library – stacks, common spaces, group study rooms, and even when seated alone. Staff on duty will be responsible for enforcing face covering requirements. Food and drink will not be permitted in libraries.

COMMON SPACES
Elevators, rest rooms, break rooms, and other common spaces will experience increased foot traffic as the campuses are repopulated. Common sense and courtesy are tools that will allow safe use of common spaces.

The general guidelines for keeping yourself and others safe in any environment:

- Wear a face covering.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Avoid loitering in common areas and placing personal items on restroom surfaces.
- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with warm water and soap.
- Dry hands thoroughly.

EVENTS
Events are an important part of student life and are permitted with appropriate approvals. Event organizers are responsible for obtaining appropriate approvals, enforcing face covering and other safety requirements, and registering the event in the university’s event system. Click here for additional information.
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WHILE ON CAMPUS

TRANSPORTATION
Rutgers buses and shuttles will be running in accordance with schedules published here. Effective use of face coverings is required while on Rutgers buses and shuttles. Drivers will be wearing face coverings, and vehicles will be cleaned daily. Food will not be permitted on buses and shuttles.

FACE COVERINGS
Face coverings are not required when outdoors on Rutgers property or indoors in residence hall rooms/suites. Face coverings may be removed while eating at indoor locations. Face coverings must be worn:

- Indoors in shared spaces (e.g. study rooms, meeting rooms, conference rooms, residence hall lounges, etc.).
- Indoors in classrooms, seminar rooms, lecture halls, etc.
- Indoors in private spaces with more than one occupant (shared offices).
- Indoors in public spaces (e.g. hallways, restrooms, stairs, elevators, etc.).
- In residence halls in public and shared spaces in Newark, RBHS, Newark, and Camden housing buildings.
- In Rutgers buses and shuttles.

There will be times when university personnel (custodians, mechanics, and other support staff) need to enter private offices, residence hall rooms, and other spaces where individuals are not masked. In these instances, face coverings must be put on while the support staff is in the space; the room occupant may also leave the room to allow for distancing if need be.

If you believe someone or some group is in violation of the established university safety guidelines, please fill out a COVID Observation Report. The form is not monitored in real-time and has been developed to report non-emergency concerns and should be considered the primary reporting mechanism for COVID related violations.

The responsibility to enforce COVID requirements falls locally to faculty, deans, resident assistants, program managers, department heads, and event coordinators. In public spaces like the libraries and student centers, the staff on duty will be responsible for enforcing these requirements. Faculty are expected to communicate all safety protocols to the students in their courses. Faculty should ask students not complying with these protocols to leave their classrooms. Students are expected to comply with face covering requirements at all times while on campus. University Public Safety should only be contacted if an individual is threatening or harassing and their presence is necessary to diffuse an escalating situation. See REPORTING CONCERNS section for more information.

REPORTING CONCERNS
The health and safety of our community is a shared responsibility. We expect that our community will adhere to the requirements outlined in this guide, we recognize that some matters may need further review. If you believe someone or some group is in violation of the established university safety guidelines, please fill out a COVID Observation Report. The form is not monitored in real-time and has been developed to report only non-emergency concerns.
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WHILE ON CAMPUS

VACCINATIONS
Vaccination is the cornerstone of our foundation of a safe repopulation, and vaccinations are available on campus to all members of the Rutgers community at no cost to the student or employee. The rapid spread of the Delta variant among the non-vaccinated underscores the importance and effectiveness of the vaccine. All employees are urged to get vaccinated. Vaccines are required of students. Click here for details.

TESTING AND NOTIFICATIONS
Rutgers has mandated vaccines for students, but there are a small number of students who are not vaccinated due to religious or medical reasons. Students with approved vaccination exemptions must undergo regular testing (at least once a week). The Central Distribution and Testing Centers on our campuses throughout the state administer the testing programs. Testing kits and instructions can be accessed here. Vaccinated individuals are not eligible for university testing and will be responsible for all costs associated with unauthorized testing and subject to disciplinary action.

For on-campus testing, employees and students may retrieve tests results on the REHS website. Occupational Health or Student Health will contact any employee or student with a positive test result to provide guidance on isolation, follow-up, and return to work or class. They will also determine if there were any close contacts at Rutgers who need to be notified, in accordance with the guidelines for contact tracing from the CDC and NJ DOH. A Rutgers Contact Tracer will then notify only those close contacts who may have been exposed, and instruct them on testing and quarantine, if necessary. A Contact Tracer from the local health department will also be in touch with an employee or student with positive test result, to follow up on household and community contacts who need to be notified.

If an employee or student were tested at an off-campus test site and receive a positive test result, the employee or student should isolate at home (or in residence hall room if a resident student), and not report to work or school. Campus Occupational Health or Student Health office should be notified, who will then follow the process above to determine if any colleagues or students need to be contacted. If you are a residential student and you test positive, you must notify Student Wellness immediately.

QUARANTINING
Fully vaccinated individuals who are exposed to a positive case of COVID-19 but remain asymptomatic are not required to quarantine and may continue their regular activities. Unvaccinated individuals who are exposed to a positive case of COVID-19 must quarantine, even if asymptomatic. Note that CDC defines exposure as a minimum of 15 minutes within 6 feet of a person who has COVID-19, without appropriate protection.
Comprehensive resources regarding health and safety during the pandemic are available here. Employees and students should familiarize themselves with the resources available.

**MY CAMPUS PASS**

We share a collective responsibility to protect one another and ourselves from COVID-19. The shared responsibility for the health and safety of the Rutgers community during the pandemic begins each day with every employee and student planning to be on campus making a quick self-assessment - monitoring for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 before reporting to work, leaving the residence hall, or coming to campus. If an employee does not feel well or is sick, then the standard practice of notifying a supervisor and charging the appropriate time-off is mandatory.

The university has developed a screening app, My Campus Pass, available through the myRutgers portal or via the My Dashboard screen. This tool is intended to inform you, the user, and need not be exhibited to gain entry into any Rutgers building. All members of the Rutgers community must use the self-screening tool and be guided accordingly. More information can be found here.

**HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

This is a difficult time that presents extraordinary stressors and burdens for members of the Rutgers community. Please remember that support and guidance are available to students, faculty, and staff regardless of location. Resources for both mental health and medical health are available on campus and, for employees, via the MyWellness section of the Rutgers University mobile app.

Students in need of support or assistance with mental health concerns or wellness needs may contact:

- In New Brunswick: health.rutgers.edu or health.rutgers.edu/counseling/
- In Newark: studentaffairs.newark.rutgers.edu/health-wellness/ or studentaffairs.newark.rutgers.edu/health-wellness/counseling-center
- In Camden: wellnesscenter.camden.rutgers.edu/ or wellnesscenter.camden.rutgers.edu/psychological-counseling-services/

Employees in need of mental health support or assistance may contact Rutgers 4U, a confidential support line offering motional and therapeutic support to faculty, staff, and families at (855) 652-6819. Other resources for employees are listed in the My Wellness section of the the Rutgers University mobile app.
As the public health situation in our region continues to improve, Rutgers will continue to comply with state requirements and public health guidelines. These requirements change frequently, and as such the information in this guide is subject to continual updating.

The Guiding Principles of Repopulation of Our Campuses:

1. We must recognize that the mission of teaching, research, clinical care, and service exists because of students. As the students return, so must the faculty and staff of Rutgers. As students, faculty, and staff return, we all must work together to ensure a safe, healthy campus community.

2. To ensure the commitment to the health and safety of our community remains paramount.
   - Public health guidelines will continue to be adhered to.
   - State requirements will be followed.
   - Science will lead us.

3. To recognize that safe repopulation of our university locations remains a shared responsibility.
   - We all have to play a part in keeping our spaces safe.
   - There will be equity in how our units manage the return to campus.