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Reopening: Guidance for **Institutions of Higher Education**

Guidance Document

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Overview

Many institutions of higher education (IHEs), such as colleges and universities, are planning on reopening campuses in the fall and welcoming back the physical return of large numbers of students, faculty, and staff. The following guidance and considerations offer ways in which IHEs can help to slow the spread of COVID-19 and maintain a healthful campus life/experience. Overall, it is advised that IHEs take a controlled and phased (stepwise) approach to re-opening campuses. Various methods will need to be employed to control and slow the spread of COVID-19, including physical distancing, face coverings, increased disinfection and ventilation, and decreased campus density, among others. While new campus protocols may need to be developed and implemented, it will be important to continually re-evaluate the efficacy of those protocols and adjust accordingly.

With many colleges, universities and other IHEs planning on re-opening campuses (possibly as early as August) administrators, students, parents, faculty, and staff are faced with difficult questions:

- How can we protect the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff returning to campus?
- How do we assure faculty, staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders that we are doing all we can to prevent the spread of disease?
- What do we do if a student, faculty member, or staff person comes in contact with a person who has tested positive or has a suspected case of COVID-19?
- How do we best protect high risk populations?
- What steps need to be taken regarding increased cleaning and disinfection?
- Is it safe for students to move back into on-campus housing?

- How do we handle crowd management throughout high traffic or common areas, including at peak times?

The purpose of this guide is to provide clear and actionable guidance towards the safe reopening and operation of IHEs through prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19. This document is intended to provide guidance for a range of small to medium sized IHEs, including private and public universities and colleges, and technical, trade, and vocational schools, that may not have access to in-house health and safety professionals. It is encouraged that IHEs consider making a gradual return to modified operations, and to consistently monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented mitigation measures and alter their approach as needed.

The following document addresses areas of campus life that have not been previously evaluated in other AIHA Guidance documents. These areas include: shared or congregate housing (i.e., residence halls), instruction/learning environments (i.e., classrooms or lecture halls), and research facilities/laboratories. Please refer to the Resources section below for links to AIHA Guidance documents concerning other areas of campus life, including: [libraries](#), [offices](#), [child-care facilities](#), [restaurants/dining halls](#), [retail](#), [ride sharing](#), [small and medium sports and entertainment venues](#), [places of worship and religious gatherings](#), [gyms and workout facilities](#), and [construction work](#) that may take place on campus.

What actions should an Institution of Higher Education take to protect faculty, staff and students on campus?

IHE leadership should continually monitor international (World Health Organization (WHO)), federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines for updates and changes in recommendations, cleaning and disinfecting strategies, and other best management



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practices. They should seek guidance from regional, national, and international leaders relative to health policy and best practices. They should consider forming a team of professionals to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. In addition, IHEs should consider the following strategies for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in regard to physical distancing strategies, enhanced cleaning practices, restrooms, employee and student wellness, training, and risk communication.

Due to the wide variety of IHEs (e.g., geographic location, size, physical layout, and structure), it may not be possible to implement all of the following recommendations; however, IHEs are encouraged to work with state and local health officials on whether and how to implement these considerations, and make the necessary adjustments to meet the specific needs of the IHE, and the local community.

Shared or Congregate Housing

- Encourage physical distancing by asking staff and students to stay at least 6 feet apart from each other, and to wear cloth face coverings in any shared spaces.
- Limit staff and other students from entering students' rooms or living quarters (unless necessary).
- Ensure buildings are equipped with fresh air whenever possible and optimize the ventilation system settings when fresh air is not possible. Some ways to do this or seek help:
 - Open doors and windows if possible.
 - Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
 - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
 - Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
 - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
- Consider discontinuing or limiting non-essential visitors or outside volunteers.
- Cancel or postpone special large group events/gatherings (e.g., festivals, holiday events, and special performances). If possible, encourage essential events (e.g., orientations for new students) to be outdoors, as much as possible.
- If possible, arrange for administrative staff to work from home.
- If physical distancing is not possible for front desk personnel or other staff, then partitions should be considered between staff/desks and the students/residents.
- Consider providing disinfection supplies and to other supplies such as tissues and trash bags (if possible).
- Common areas (e.g., lobby, check-in desk, laundry facilities, game rooms, computer rooms, etc.)
 - All common areas should be equipped with a hand sanitizing station at each entrance; this includes entrances to each room or building.
 - Ensure that common areas are adequately and continuously stocked with hand sanitizer, soap, and paper towels. Encourage frequent hand washing.
 - Provide signage and training on how to sanitize and/or wash hands properly in common areas.
 - Regulate the use of common areas with clear signage (including maximum occupancy) and physical distancing measures in accordance with public health rules and guidelines.
 - Place marks on floor of lobby and common areas wherever a line may develop to assure proper physical distancing.
 - Common areas should be cleaned and disinfected daily (at a minimum) and considering performing hourly. This includes commonly touched surfaces and equipment (elevator buttons, door-



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knobs, light switches, etc.) in common areas (e.g., laundry facilities, shared kitchens, shared bathrooms, computer rooms, dining rooms).

- Consider closing some or all of the shared spaces. If not possible, limit the number of individuals allowed in a common area or shared space at one time, including visitors, and encourage physical distancing.
- Encourage students and staff not to linger or socialize in common areas.
- Activities that involve close contact are not recommended in common areas.
- Remove all shared literature, magazines etc. from common areas such as the front desk, lobby, etc.
- Stagger schedules during high traffic times in common areas to reduce mixing and close contact (e.g., move-in, meal, activity time).
 - Minimize foot traffic in enclosed spaces. Consider limiting the number of individuals in elevators and, if possible, designate one directional stairwells.
 - For move-in, consider ways to decrease the number of individuals in common or high traffic areas such as staggered schedules or shipping of personal items to residences.
 - Encourage online posting of classified discussions to discourage crowding in shared spaces.
- Use gloves when handling and removing trash and wash hands after touching garbage bags or trash cans.
- Shared Dining/Kitchen Areas (For Dining Halls, see AIHA Restaurant Guidelines)
 - Consider eliminating shared common areas for snacks, beverages (i.e. water, coffee).
 - Kitchen areas and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected daily (at a minimum); after cleaning, cutlery and dishware should be stored to prevent contamination.
 - The outside of dishwashers as well as the handle should be cleaned at the beginning and end of the day.
 - All silverware and dinnerware should be cleaned in the dishwasher, when available.
 - Silverware should be stored in a way so that adjacent silverware is not easily touched when retrieving a piece.
 - If silverware and dishes cannot be kept clean and covered, disposable options are recommended.
 - Install touchless water/beverage faucets when possible. Non-touchless water/beverage faucets should be disinfected throughout the day.
 - Ice machines that require a handheld scoop should not be used, as it is difficult to control potential contamination.
 - Arrange seating of chairs and tables to be at least 6 feet apart during shared meals or other events.
- Living Quarters and Bathrooms (see also Restrooms Section below)
 - If possible, assign one single resident per room (unless they are in the same family unit).
 - Disinfect doorknobs and other high touch surfaces at least daily.
 - Encourage residents to keep their windows open when possible to increase airflow.
 - Shared bathrooms should be cleaned regularly (at least twice per day and possibly after times of heavy use).
 - Inform residents that sinks or counter surfaces may be a source of contamination. Request residents refrain from placing toothbrushes, or other toiletries directly on sink or counter surfaces. For example, totes can be used to store toiletries and hung to reduce contact with surfaces in bathroom (when possible).



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- Limit the capacity of the bathroom (depending on size and HVAC capacity). Consider using floor markings to encourage physical distancing. Consider staggering bathroom schedules to reduce density in bathrooms during times of peak use so that lines do not form.

Instruction/Learning Environments

- Consider developing a physical distancing plan for each course, classroom or lecture hall which may include number of students/faculty per session, length of session, nature of activities, process for symptom checks (see below), physical distancing, face coverings, enhanced cleaning, and good hygiene.
- Modify the layout of classrooms to allow for physical distancing.
 - Space seating/desks at least 6 feet apart (when feasible).
 - For large lecture halls, consider taping-off seats or rows to allow for proper physical distancing.
 - Limit the number of in-person attendees; conduct smaller classes in larger classrooms to allow for proper physical distancing/spacing.
 - Consider offering a combination (hybrid) approach of some distance learning and some in-person learning to reduce the number of in-person attendees. Consider creating multiple sections/shifts to reduce the number of in-person attendees.
 - Consider outdoor learning, when feasible.
- Consider staggering class schedules to reduce the density of students in high traffic areas. Consider touchless entry for buildings, classrooms, or lecture halls.
- Avoid sharing objects such as electronic devices, books, pens, demonstratives, or other learning aids. Discourage the use of shared items that are difficult to clean or disinfect.
- Develop specialized plans for courses/instruction where physical distancing is not possible, or that involve high contact activities.

Research Facilities/Laboratories

- Laboratory occupants should always wear face coverings and (when needed, based on the test or procedure) face shields.
- Ensure that laboratories are adequately and continuously stocked with disinfectant supplies, hand sanitizer, soap, and paper towels. Encourage frequent hand washing.
- Arrange workstations to accommodate physical distancing of at least six feet (taking into consideration flow of foot traffic). Use physical dividers if unable to separate workstations.
- Use floor markings as needed to promote physical distancing. Consider making one-way foot traffic.
- Avoid sharing PPE as much as possible; disinfect reusable PPE between uses (e.g., safety glasses, splash goggles, face shields).
- Establish a disinfection routine so that common areas can be routinely cleaned and disinfected. Consider using a checklist or audit system to track when and how cleaning is conducted.
- Do not mix different EPA registered chemicals together. The combination could be toxic by inhalation.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) and follow manufacturer specifications for cleaning and surface contact duration.
- Consider consulting an Industrial Hygiene expert if additional advice is needed. AIHA has a [consulting list](#) of qualified Industrial Hygienists.
- Any reusable cloth materials (such as lab coats) should be washed with detergent and dried on the highest temperature setting for the fabric after use.



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- Ensure all commercial laundry services are aware of the potential for SARS CoV-2 viral exposure before laundering.
 - Limit the number of laboratory occupants to allow for physical distancing. Consider staggering laboratory schedules/shifts to reduce the number of laboratory occupants. Create schedules for shared equipment. Maintain compliance with local or IHE-specific guidance where applicable (i.e. maintaining no fewer than two personnel in the laboratory at a time during certain analytical procedures or use of certain chemicals).
 - Determine which procedures can be performed remotely, including laboratory meetings, study design, data analysis, writing, etc.
 - Review laboratory-assigned duties and consider reassignment, cross-training, or coordination.
 - Confirm outside contractors have established COVID-19 protocols and procedures consistent with IHE requirements.
- Enhanced Cleaning Practices**
- Provide cleaning supplies for employees to utilize before and after they use common spaces and contact surfaces.
 - Do not mix different EPA registered chemicals together. The combination could be toxic by inhalation.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) and follow manufacturer specifications for cleaning and surface contact duration.
 - Consider consulting an Industrial Hygiene expert if additional advice is needed. AIHA has a consulting list of qualified Industrial Hygienists.
 - Disinfect all surfaces and commonly touched equipment and educate employees on common high-touch surfaces in the facility (e.g., doorknobs, faucet handles, light switches, etc.)
 - All items should be allowed to dry thoroughly following cleaning. See cleaning product-specific instructions to determine the necessary contact and drying time.
 - Perform normal routine cleaning of outdoor areas, such as parks.
 - Do not spray disinfectant on outdoor playgrounds or benches.
 - High touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as grab bars and railings, should be cleaned routinely.
 - Cleaning and disinfection of wooden surfaces (play structures, benches, tables) or groundcovers (mulch, sand) is not recommended.
 - Do not disinfect sidewalks and roads.
 - Spread of COVID-19 from these surfaces is very low and disinfection is not effective.
 - Develop strategies to minimize contact with commonly touched surfaces, and wash hands/utilize hand sanitizer before and after touching high-touch surfaces.
 - Establish a disinfection routine so that common areas can be routinely cleaned and disinfected.
 - Consider using a checklist or audit system to track when and how cleaning is conducted.
 - Seating, doors, restrooms, common areas, etc. should be disinfected at the end of each day.
 - Do not use a wet rag approach (use disposable products instead).
 - Use disposable paper towels or other artifacts to wipe surfaces clean. Hard surfaces can air dry rather than wiping.
 - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time.
 - Books and other paper-based materials are not considered a high risk for transmission and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection. Plastic



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coverings on books or other plastic or metal materials should be disinfected between use.

Ventilation

- Ensure there is an adequate flow of fresh air to classrooms and other spaces and optimize the ventilation system settings. Some ways to do this or seek help:
 - Open doors and windows if possible.
 - Maximize fresh air through your ventilation system.
 - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
 - If you don't know how, ask an HVAC professional and see [ASHRAE](#) updates for more information.
 - Consider using portable HEPA filtration units.
- If fans such as pedestal fans or hard mounted fans are used, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly at another individual. If fans are disabled or removed, staff should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent [heat hazards](#).

Restrooms

- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if possible.
- Place a trash can by the door if the door cannot be opened without touching the handle.
- For single restrooms, provide signage and materials (paper towels and trash cans) for individuals to use without touching the handles, and consider providing a key so disinfection measures can be better controlled.
 - If a key is used, it too should be disinfected after each use
- Place signs above toilet lids (if present) to indicate that they should be closed before flushing.

- Encourage students, faculty, and staff to wash their hands before and after using the restroom; place signage when appropriate.
- Provide paper towels and air dryers in restrooms.
 - The WHO and CDC currently state that hands can be dried using a paper towel or hand dryer.
 - Due to current uncertainties surrounding the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, care should be taken when using a hand dryer or paper towel.
 - The use of touch or push hand dryers is discouraged due to possible surface contamination. If hand dryers are used, consider touchless devices.
 - Work with HVAC professionals to ensure that bathrooms are well ventilated.
- Double efforts to keep bathrooms clean and properly disinfected. Maintain a record of sanitary work practices to ensure that this is performed routinely.

Student, Faculty, and Staff Wellness

- Communicate to students, faculty, and staff the importance of being vigilant for symptoms and staying in touch with campus officials if or when they start to feel sick.
- Establish routine, daily wellness health checks on arrival (such as temperature screening and symptom screening of students, faculty, and staff). Conduct screenings safely, respectfully, and with measures in place to ensure confidentiality, as well as in accordance with any applicable privacy laws or regulations:
 - Perform a temperature check to ensure that anyone with a fever is not admitted to the facility. Additional screening information/guidance can be found on the [CDC website](#).
 - Perform a visual inspection for other signs of illness (e.g., flushed cheeks, rapid or difficulty breathing without recent physical activity, fatigue, cough).



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- Persons who have a fever of 100°F (38°C) or above, or other signs of illness should not be admitted to the facility.
- Have a plan if someone is sick.
- Options for daily health check screenings are provided in CDC's [General Business FAQs](#) for screening individuals.
- Stagger staff shifts, start times, and break times (as feasible).
- Ask students, faculty, and staff to consider the following if they commute to work using public transportation :
 - Use other forms of transportation.
 - Change their commute time to less busy times when possible.
 - Wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip.
- Provide students, faculty, and staff with adequate time and access to soap, clean water, and single use paper towels for handwashing.
 - Remind them to [wash their hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - Ensure adequate supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, tissues) to support healthy hygiene practices.
- [Post signs and reminders](#) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. This should include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Remind students, faculty, and staff to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Remind students, faculty, and staff if someone coughs or sneezes, they should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette.
- Remind employees that people may be able to spread COVID-19 even if they do not show symptoms. Consider all close interactions (within 6 feet) with students, faculty, staff, and others as a potential source of exposure.
- Face coverings should be worn as feasible.
 - Teach and reinforce use of cloth face coverings among all students, faculty, and staff. Face coverings are most essential in times when physical distancing is not possible. Students, faculty, and staff should be frequently reminded not to touch their face covering and to wash their hands frequently. Information should be provided to all on proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings.
 - Consider providing disposable or washable face coverings to students and staff (if possible). Consider enlisting campus student, faculty or staff leadership to serve as face covering or mask ambassadors, by carrying face masks and distributing them to students, faculty or staff not wearing face coverings when on campus.
 - Additional information on cloth masks can be found on [CDC's website](#).
 - Cloth face coverings may prevent people who do not know they have the virus from transmitting it to others; these face coverings are not surgical masks, respirators, or personal protective equipment (PPE). Homemade face coverings primarily protect others not yourself.
 - Cloth face coverings should NOT be placed on young children under age 2, or on anyone who



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has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

- If an IHE chooses to provide an N95 respirator to an employee, please fully consider all the potential OSHA requirements.

Training

- IHEs should notify students, faculty, and staff of new policies and changes prior to reopening and upon resuming operations.
- Train students, faculty, and staff on new or modified schedules, how they can stay up to date on new scheduling requirements, and how faculty and staff can make requests for schedule changes if a need arises.
- Faculty and staff should receive, at minimum, awareness training on cleaning and disinfection products used in the workplace following OSHA Hazard Communication Standards. For employees who will use disinfectants and cleaners, training should also include proper use, PPE, disposal and all precautionary measures. Consider also offering these trainings to students, particularly those who live on campus.
- Health checks and reporting requirements of individuals infected with COVID-19 should be explained to students, faculty, and staff prior to reopening and again once operations have resumed.
 - Students, faculty, and staff should evaluate their health constantly; if they are sick, have a fever or other symptoms, or someone at home is sick, then they should remain home.
 - **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**

Communication

- Communicate to students, faculty, and staff about what is being done to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies

for staff, physical distancing, and health and safety measures in place).

- Consider communicating the visible symptoms of COVID-19 exposure.
- Platforms for verbal or written communication can include the use of social media, websites, the course website and/or syllabus, and posting information on indoor or outdoor bulletin boards.

Other Control Measures

- Plan for students, faculty, or staff absences by developing flexible attendance and sick-leave policies, plan for alternative coverage, and monitor and track COVID-19 related staff absences. Consider offering distance learning or testing options if needed.
- Stay informed about local COVID-19 information and updates in your geographic area.
- Depending on local requirements, for those who cannot maintain physical distancing as part of their job, provide or encourage all employees to wear face coverings and gloves and to use hand sanitizer.

What can IHE Faculty and Staff do to protect themselves and minimize the transmission of COVID-19?

- Evaluate your health constantly. If you are sick, stay home. If you have an elevated temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact with someone who became sick, stay home and monitor your health. If you have another medical illness or are at high risk, stay home as much as possible. **NOTE: HIPAA guidelines and other privacy laws should be followed at all times.**
- Wear a face covering when in public and during the workday and maintain physical distancing.



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- Wash your hands when you arrive at work, throughout the day after various activities (e.g., before and after preparing food, after handling garbage, after using the bathroom etc.), after touching your face covering, when you leave work, and when you arrive home.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about the PPE that may be provided to you and that you are properly instructed on how to use it.
- Consider carrying a handkerchief or disposable tissue; if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth, and mask. Wash your hands and face thoroughly before returning to work or entering a classroom. Replace your mask if soiled. Clean reusable handkerchiefs and masks should be kept separate from ones that are contaminated.

What can **Students** do to protect themselves and minimize the transmission of COVID-19?

- Evaluate your health constantly. If you are sick, stay home. If either of you have an elevated temperature, stay home. If someone at home is sick or you came into contact with someone who became sick, stay home and monitor your health. If you have another medical illness and are at high risk, stay home as much as possible.
- Wear a face covering when out in public and maintain physical distancing (maintain 6-feet of separation from others) when outside the home.
- Wash your hands throughout the day, after sneezing or coughing, and after touching your face or face covering.
- Carry a handkerchief or disposable tissue; if you get the urge to sneeze or cough, cover your nose, mouth and mask in an attempt to prevent the

spread of droplets or aerosol transmission. Wash your hands and face thoroughly before reentering a classroom. Replace your mask if soiled. Clean reusable handkerchiefs and masks should be kept separate from ones that are contaminated.

Resources

- [American College Health Association \(ACHA\). Considerations for reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era.](#)
- [Campus Safety, Health, and Environmental Management Association \(CSHEMA\). Checklist for restarting laboratories on college and university campuses.](#)
- [CDC COVID-10 Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing.](#)
- [CDC Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education.](#)
- [CDC What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know about COVID-19.](#)
- [CDC's General Business FAQs.](#)
- [CDC General Business Frequently Asked Questions.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility Everyday Steps, Steps When Someone is Sick, and Considerations for Employers.](#)
- [CDC Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles: Interim Recommendations for U.S. Non-emergency Transport Vehicles that May Have Transported Passengers with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\).](#)



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About Occupational Health and Safety Professionals

Occupational health and safety (OHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice

the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

Get additional resources at AIHA's [Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center](#).

Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OEHS professionals near you in our [Consultants Listing](#).

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These guidance documents were primarily developed for those smaller business that don't have readily available occupational health and safety resources, and designed to help business owners, employers, employees and consumers implement science-backed procedures for limiting the spread of the coronavirus. They are subject to any local, state, or federal directives, laws, or orders about operating a business and should only be used if they do not conflict with any such orders.

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