

MEMORANDUM

To: All Students, Residents, Staff & Faculty
Fr: David A. Heath, OD, EdM, President *DAH*
Date: 13 December 2021
Re: Spring 2022 – COVID-19 Policies & Protocols

As we move into the holidays, our pandemic management plans for the spring semester have been finalized. This communication is intended to provide a summary of updated COVID-19 related policies and protocols for the College community and for health and safety on our 33 West 42nd Street campus.

This is very important information, please read this in its entirety!

Note: Please bear in mind that with the increasing prevalence of the Omicron and Delta variants nationwide, all health and safety policies are subject to change.

Current Status:

As of December 13th, I am happy to report 100% of our students and faculty are fully vaccinated. Staff is over 99% fully vaccinated at this time. With the emergence of the Omicron Variant, the CDC recommends booster shots for everyone over 18 years old who received their second dose of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago or received the Janssen (J&J) vaccine at least 2 months ago. Currently, 33% of our population have received their booster shots. (Faculty 61%, Staff 28% and Students 31%)

I am also pleased to highlight that since testing began in the fall of 2020, we have conducted 8,407 tests on campus and have an overall positivity rate of only 0.14% with just 12 COVID-positive findings to date. Our last on-campus positive test result remains from late April. That said, there is a significant uptick in new cases nationally. Cases of the Omicron variant have begun appearing in New York. While health officials are still working to learn more about the new variant, the identified cases appear to be relatively mild with regard to symptoms.

Given the high vaccination rate within our College community, the campus is a relatively safe haven, but we must remain diligent in our mitigation efforts so that we can continue with normal campus operations, with an ongoing commitment to the health and safety of our community!

Spring 2022
Summary of COVID-19 Health and Safety Policies

Health & Safety –

1. **COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate:** In late August the NYS Department of Health issued an emergency regulation mandating that “covered personnel” of certain health care facilities (including the College/UEC) be vaccinated against COVID-19. This regulation did not provide an option for testing in lieu of vaccination, and allowed only medical exemptions to be considered.

At this time all students, faculty and staff are required to be fully vaccinated for the SARS-CoV-2 virus unless they have been granted a medical exemption.

2. **COVID-19 Booster Shots:** While not yet mandated by the State nor SUNY System, **all students and employees are strongly encouraged to get their booster shot as soon as they are eligible**, both for their protection (particularly in light of the Omicron variant) and others. We believe it is highly likely that booster shots will be mandated and, for students, it is possible that it will linked to the start of the spring semester. As there is an increasing demand for the vaccine, appointments are getting more difficult to get, so plan in advance!

If you have received your booster shot, but have not uploaded an image of your vaccination card, please do so. **To report:** [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](https://jotform.com) or through the [SafeInSight app](#).

3. **Pre-arrival Spring 2022 semester testing for 1st and 2nd year students:** Due to the prolonged holiday break, increase in travel and rise of new cases in various states, **the College will require 1st and 2nd year students to submit PCR test results from a test taken within 72 hours prior to returning to campus** to start the spring semester. This rule applies even if the student has not left New York State. All tests should be uploaded to ([Back to School - Spring 2022](#)). Anyone receiving a positive test result is to self-isolate and contact Nurse Gomez CGomez2@sunyopt.edu for next steps.

4. **Random Surveillance Testing:** Weekly surveillance COVID-19 testing of 12 students and 12 employees (in addition to any new employees who are not yet fully vaccinated and require weekly testing) began on November 30th. The model for this random surveillance testing program is geared towards a more independent check-in process and specimen collection. The new location for this testing program is the Folsom Conference Room (rm. 1223) on the 12th floor. Those selected for surveillance testing will receive an email from Nurse Gomez with detailed instructions.

Compliance is being monitored. If you miss your assigned testing day, you must notify Nurse Gomez and provide an outside COVID-19 PCR test result.

5. **Masks:** Pursuant to CDC guidance and New York City requirements, all personnel (i.e. faculty, staff, students, patients and visitors) are still required to wear masks indoors. The number of positive cases/100,000 people has not decreased in NYC recently and it is unlikely that it will due to an anticipated spike in cases seen in the winter months with increased indoor gatherings. **Masks are required in the following areas:**

- **Lectures Halls and other teaching spaces including the theater:** During lectures, all students (both vaccinated and unvaccinated) must wear approved face coverings. Those lecturing may remove their mask to ensure the clarity of sound both for those attending in person and those accessing the lecture remotely through video/audio links.
- **Teaching Laboratories:** ASTM level 2 surgical masks are still required in teaching laboratories. Students receive a supply of masks at the start of the semester.
- **Public Spaces:** This includes the lobby, elevators, hallways, the student center, the library, and the fitness center.
- **University Eye Center:** Continues to require all students, residents, faculty, staff and patients (and other visitors) **to wear masks at all times when in UEC patient-care areas**, (floors 5, 6, 7, 8 and the Barbara Saltzman Center for Pediatric Eye Care on the 10th floor). Students, residents, staff and faculty are to wear ASTM level 2 surgical masks in all clinical settings. Additional precautions may be required in certain areas as communicated by the UEC administration.

6. **Cleaning, Disinfecting & Hand Hygiene:** Protocols for cleaning, disinfecting and hand hygiene remain in place. Please be considerate and clean an area you have been using before you leave.

The College's facilities and maintenance team will continue to follow all CDC and State guidance for proper cleaning and sanitation throughout all areas of the College.

7. **All Visitors (including patients)** – Signage will be prominently placed indicating that visitors who are unvaccinated are expected to wear masks and to comply with all institutional health and safety standards. Visitors will undergo thermal screening and must answer a health screening questionnaire upon entry to the building. Those hosting visitors are expected to communicate expectations in advance and to help ensure compliance.

Academic Program Information –

Our teaching spaces will remain at full capacity. Specifically,

1. **Schedules:** Spring schedules will be back to pre-pandemic scheduling with a few adjustments for new courses. The course schedules were distributed in November 2021.
2. **Lectures:** With a few exceptions for off-site adjunct faculty, all lectures are being conducted

in-person, live-streamed via Zoom, and recorded. Students have the option of attending in-person or remotely, or viewing recordings asynchronously.

3. **Labs and small groups:** All labs and small group seminars are returning to their pre-pandemic (normal) capacity and will be fully in-person.
4. **Exams:** All exams will be conducted in-person at the College in the lecture halls. They will not be given remotely. Lab practicals will be in-person as usual.
5. **Small tests and quizzes:** May be given at that discretion of the course IORs. These may be in-person or via Moodle.

Research Program Information –

1. **Research:** The College’s research programs have been fully operational since the summer of 2020 and will remain so in 2022.
2. **Graduate Education:** Graduate level courses will continue to be taught in-person in 2022.
3. **SIVR Colloquia Series:** Presentations resumed in the fall, beginning with the slate of speakers whose talks were cancelled in spring 2020. Speakers are invited to the College, respecting all federal, state, and local guidelines. Most speakers will present in-person, but some may be remote/on-line dependent on the preference of invited speakers.
4. **VisioNYC:** The VisioNYC meetings, which are held at the College and attended by vision scientists throughout the metropolitan area, have resumed in-person with proof of vaccination required.

University Eye Center (UEC) Information -

1. **CDC Guidelines:** As an Article 28 diagnostic and treatment center, the University Eye Center will continue to adhere to all NYSDOH and CDC guidance for healthcare settings (e.g., cleaning protocols, for patients - symptom and exposure screening, thermal screening, etc.).
2. **Reporting Vaccination Status:** As per NYSDOH, all employees in healthcare settings are required to report their COVID-19 vaccination status. The UEC will continue to enforce this mandate for initial vaccination, as well as for any potential future DOH mandates regarding boosters.
3. **Face Coverings:** All patients, visitors, faculty, residents, staff and students must wear an appropriate face covering at all times while in patient-care areas, as required by NYSDOH.
4. **Cleaning Protocols:** Service-specific cleaning protocols (e.g., diagnostic equipment, clinical devices), as approved by the Environmental and Safety Committee, will continue to be utilized as appropriate.

Event Planning –

All on-campus events must incorporate the appropriate and current health and safety protocols. It is paramount to maintain the health and safety of the SUNY College of Optometry community; therefore, this guidance may be revised at any time should the risk of outbreak increase with new variants or other factors. This policy with additional materials may be found at

<https://sunyopt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Event-Guidance-for-COVID-19-FINAL.pdf>.

1. **Guests and Registration:**

- Events or gatherings, including social events, should be planned in advance. Those with any substantial number of external guests (i.e. more than a speaker, or panel of speakers) should be submitted to the area vice president for review.
- All guest speakers, lecturers, and attendees must abide by the College's policies and be informed of mask wearing, health screening, and other appropriate protocols in advance of coming to campus. Guests will be required to follow the appropriate protocols and may be asked to leave the event and/or campus if they violate the protocols.
- All events or gatherings must track attendees through a registration and/or check-in process. Documentation of attendees should be retained for at least 30 days.
- All attendees to any event or gathering held on the College campus should be vaccinated. Vaccination exemptions from employers, institutions, medical providers, or other qualified exemptions will be honored.
- All attendees must attest to their vaccination status by completing the attestation document, (an example is included in Event Planning Policy and the document is available on Sharepoint), and provide proof of vaccination at check-in. Those with qualified exemptions must obtain a PCR test within 72 hours prior to the event and provide test results upon arrival.
- The attestation of vaccination status may be found at the end of this document. A template for an online registration is available from IT (Jan Gonzalez).

2. **Vendors (Catering, Flowers/Décor, A/V, etc.):**

- All external event service vendors such as a/v, catering, or other non-College personnel who will be on campus for more than a transitory period must be vaccinated and must wear a mask for the duration of their time on campus, and follow all established health and safety protocols.
- For campus events where food and/or beverages are served: Masks must be worn by all personnel delivering or serving food and beverages. All delivery personnel must complete the Health Screening Questionnaire and be escorted if delivering to a specific drop-off location within the building.

3. **Food & Beverage**

- Lines and gathering around food/beverage service areas are discouraged and should be minimized. Masks must be worn while picking up food or beverage and should not be removed until seated in the designated eating areas or table.
- Boxed, pre-packaged food, and/or "grab and go" options are strongly advised. Buffets, passed items, or other set-ups where guests would be exposed to "open" or non-packaged self-serve items are discouraged.
- As masks must be removed for active eating and drinking, events should plan to accommodate social distancing between guests. This may require reducing the number of guests seated at tables and/or providing additional space during meal time.

4. Other Considerations

- Where possible and appropriate, outside speakers should be remotely streamed (via Zoom or other platform) into a live audience on campus.
- Event coordinators will be responsible for ensuring the set-up of the event allows for compliance with campus policies such as registration and social distancing for vaccination-exempted individuals.

Other General Information –

Travel: The College’s travel policy (relative to the pandemic) is posted on the website, <https://sunyopt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Travel-Policy-12-13-21.pdf>, and in Sharepoint. Please review this prior to any travel, particularly if it is international. At this time, College-related travel is permitted. However, all travel requests by employees must be reviewed and approved in advance by the appropriate vice-president or the President.

Employee Telecommuting: The State University of New York implemented a pilot tele-commuting policy for the fall semester with an end date of December 31, 2021. We are awaiting further guidance from SUNY Administration as to whether the program will be extended.

Compliance –

Although we hope it is unnecessary, failure to comply with these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action. Failure to comply will be addressed via the appropriate disciplinary process.

As a reminder, incidences of non-compliance may be reported through the SafeInSight app under the iReport tab.

In Conclusion:

- **If you feel ill for any reason, please stay home!** And, if you are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19, please get tested!
- **Beware of complacency!** We must continue our mitigation efforts including the proper use of PPE, hand washing, and modifying our behaviors based on our surroundings.
- **All health and safety policies are subject to change!** Please continue to bear in mind that with the increasing prevalence of the Delta and Omicron variants nationwide, and given guidance by the CDC, it is quite likely that protocols may change periodically throughout the spring semester based on the prevalence of COVID-19 in the broader community.

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!