

Back to State

*Guidelines and Resources for
Staff Returning to On-Site Work*



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PennState

Looking Ahead

Thank you for the collective efforts in support of the mission of Penn State. We are proud of the tremendous resilience our employees have demonstrated as the University continues to transition throughout this pandemic.

Our top priority, at all times, is to provide a safe and healthy working and learning environment for faculty, staff, and students. This guide is intended to inform and assist you as we begin the gradual process of returning. All units, colleges, and campuses will follow general protocols and tailor these resources to their unique needs. We are working closely with local and state authorities as well to meet and, where possible, exceed their requirements.

As you know, this is a rapidly changing situation, and our guidance is subject to change during the coming months as we move into the 2021 fall semester. We will provide frequent updates as the situation warrants. All guidelines in Penn State's Back to State transition plan will align with current [CDC guidelines](#) and [Pennsylvania guidelines](#) for workplaces.

Each of us has an important role to play in keeping the Penn State community safe and healthy. Adherence to these guidelines is vital. Please check the [University's Coronavirus Information website](#) regularly for updates. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation as we begin the gradual transition back to on-site work. Thank you again for all you do for Penn State, and welcome back!

University Expectations

FALL 2021 TIMELINE AND STAFF GROUPINGS

In accordance with the expectation of a full return to on-site work in fall 2021, Penn State's Back to State transition strategy outlines a path for units to gradually return more staff employees to on-site work beginning in the summer. **By August 16, all staff employees should have a plan in place working in conjunction with their supervisor to return to on-site work.** Transition guidance is based on federal and state safety guidelines and may continue to evolve in the event our local, state, or national situation changes.

To assist units in their plans to return more staff employees to on-site work, the transition strategy divides the staff employee population into two groups, each with a projected timeframe during which they can expect to return to the workplace:

Group 1: Employees who have worked on-site in some capacity and/or whose duties must be performed on-site. Units may begin to increase the frequency with which Group 1 employees report to work on-site.

Group 2: Employees who have engaged solely in remote work during the pandemic. Supervisors may begin adding these employees to the "Return to Work" database to begin phasing these employees back into on-site work during the summer.

Requests for hybrid or remote work arrangements are subject to unit approval.

The return of employees to on-site work, no matter which group they belong to, depends on each unit's ability to maintain six feet of physical distancing and meet maximum capacity requirements, unless and until the CDC modifies or removes this recommendation.

INTERIM STAFF RETURN TO WORK STRATEGY

Supervisors and staff will work together to prepare for a return to on-site work by August 16, 2021. By this time, employees should understand the timing of their transition back to the workplace depending on their role, the needs of their unit, and health and safety guidelines.

As the University transitions to on-site work, hybrid or remote working arrangements may continue where appropriate for the position and for the unit. It is important to note that sufficient on-site staffing levels for departmental and campus needs must be maintained in order to meet operational demands. Approval of hybrid or remote working arrangements for the fall will depend on University operations and unit needs.

Requests from staff employees who are seeking a continued hybrid or remote working arrangement will be evaluated by supervisors using the following criteria. All criteria must be met for a hybrid or remote work request to be considered for approval:

1. The employee is in good standing and has met or exceeded expectations in the last two performance review cycles. New hires may be approved for remote work, but any such arrangements for fall 2021 should be evaluated by the supervisor mid-semester;
2. All or some of the employee's work can effectively be performed remotely during the fall semester;
3. The remote work arrangement being proposed enables the employee to continue to fulfill responsibilities relating to any in-person interactions with students, visitors, customers, and fellow employees.
4. The continued interim remote work request does not require unit resources beyond those that have already been devoted to remote work during the pandemic.

Please note that approval for interim remote work may only be granted for the fall semester of 2021. Approval or denial of an interim remote work request is not predictive of approval or denial of future, longer-term remote work arrangements. When the fall 2021 semester concludes, the University will introduce updated remote work policies separate from the interim arrangements described in this guide.

To read the full document this guidance is based on, follow this link to the [Fall 2021 Process for Return to On-site Work for Staff](#).

FACULTY RETURN TO WORK GUIDANCE

For faculty Back to State information, please refer to [separate guidance](#) from the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs.

Your Responsibility

GENERAL STAFF EMPLOYEE TO-DOs BEFORE RETURNING TO ON-SITE WORK

- Review the following web resources:
 - [Staff Transition Strategy document](#)
 - [Fall 2021 Process for Return to On-site Work for Staff document](#)
 - [Return to Work website](#)
- Discuss the following topics with your supervisor:
 - Your employee group (Group 1 or 2, as defined on page 4 of this guide)
 - The expected date for your return to on-site work
 - Potential impacts to your work schedule related to health and safety requirements (alternating days, change in hours, etc.)
 - Potential changes to your workspace
- While the University does not require employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, we highly encourage everyone to seek vaccination if you have not already done so. As of May 12, all people age 12 and older are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and according to the CDC, it considers the COVID-19 vaccines currently being administered in the United States safe and effective in protecting you and those around you from serious illness. For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine, visit the [CDC](#) and [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#) websites.

MANAGER TO-DOs BEFORE RETURNING TO ON-SITE WORK

- Ensure that you understand your unit's plan and expectations for return to on-site work for your staff employees. Review all guidance that may have been sent by your area's leaders and reach out to appropriate area leaders as necessary.
- Contact your area's [Pandemic Safety Officer](#) for information on how/when work-places will be prepared for the return of more employees. Plan to coordinate with your Pandemic Safety Officer throughout the process of returning employees to the workplace. Topics to address with your area's Pandemic Safety Officer include:
 - Potential space reconfiguration
 - Signage and visual cues
 - Changes to common areas such as copy rooms, break rooms, and kitchens

- Notify your unit's Facilities Coordinator of increased presence on campus by your employees to ensure adequate cleaning, PPE, and supplies.
- Review the following web resources:
 - [Staff Transition Strategy document](#)
 - [Fall 2021 Process for Return to On-site Work for Staff document](#)
 - [Supervisors Guide to Assessing Suitability for Remote Work document](#)
 - [Return to the workplace planning guide and checklist](#)
- Prepare to discuss returning to work with your staff employees. For each employee you oversee, evaluate whether they are in Group 1 or 2, as defined on page 4 of this guide.
 - Inform your employees of their group and set up time to meet with them to outline expectations, such as:
 - Plans to increase the frequency of on-site work (if Group 1) or plans to return to on-site work (if Group 2)
 - Any impacts to their typical work schedules necessitated by health and safety guidelines (alternating days, change in hours, etc.)
 - Potential changes to their workspaces or overall work environment
 - Evaluate any remote work requests from your staff employees.
 - Begin by evaluating requests based on employee, job, and environmental characteristics as outlined in the [Supervisors Guide to Assessing Suitability for Remote Work](#) document.
 - If your assessment of employee, job, and environmental characteristics shows that a continued remote work arrangement is suitable, submit the employee's request to your unit executive through any appropriate unit approval channels. Unit executives will review requests in consultation with HR strategic partners.
 - When final review is complete, document the status of the request. Documentation must include requester name, reason for remote work, employee's schedule, location of remote work station, and approval/or denial by unit. Documentation must also state that the approval only applies to the fall 2021 semester. Supervisors retain the right to change or cancel the remote work arrangement prior to the end of the approved semester.

PANDEMIC SAFETY OFFICERS

Pandemic Safety Officers are designated members of Penn State teams, units, and colleges across all campuses who are responsible for implementing COVID-19 safety procedures within their respective unit workplaces and buildings. These individuals plan for the implementation of safety procedures regarding obtaining supplies, reconfiguring workspaces, coordinating response to possible COVID-19 cases in areas, and more.

Details on the roles and responsibilities of Pandemic Safety Officers can be found [here](#). The current list of Pandemic Safety Officers is available on the [Environmental Health and Safety \(EHS\) website](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) is available on the Penn State [Virus Info website](#).

Campus Expectations

A SAFE WORKPLACE

Visitor Information

The University's gradual return to on-site operations, including the reopening of certain work and public areas, is set to be complete in fall 2021, subject to all CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines. All visitors are required to comply with University safety practices, including wearing a mask. Facilities that allow visitors need to have appropriate signage in place to allow for these safety practices. Penn State employees will resume more regular in-person interaction with visitors and guests during the fall; however, we encourage continuing virtual engagements wherever possible. Please ensure you have your Penn State identification card with you at all times to permit your access to authorized facilities and to help us prevent unauthorized access to work areas.

It is the sole responsibility of individual visitors to adhere to guidelines and procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. A participant's vaccine status does not impact their obligations to adhere to these guidelines. The University will strictly enforce its policies and procedures and reserves the right to cancel functions and/or expel any attendees who do not adhere to its policies. For more information on visitors, group events, hiring, and related situations, please review the Visitors to Penn State Campuses guide.

Physical Distancing in Shared Spaces

While physical distancing is not currently a University requirement, resources are available for units that may still want to reconfigure spaces. Each unit has a Facilities Coordinator for all academic and administrative buildings, who partners with OPP to discuss adjustments that need to be made to spaces, signage needs, and other visual cues that support proper physical distancing. These strategies may be instated in spaces such as break rooms, copy rooms, and storage areas. When planning for reconfigurations, consider minor adjustments and target furniture that can be easily moved. Avoid major investments in temporary worksite reconfigurations. Please reach out to your supervisor for specific instructions or if you have questions.

A SAFE WORKPLACE

Conducting Meetings



As we resume on-site work, employees will be conducting more meetings in person, it is important that current University guidance is followed, such as utilizing the appropriate facial coverings. In order to stay up to date on guidance, please visit the [Penn State Virus Info website](#) for more information.

Meals in the Workspace



For your own protection and to limit occasions of incidental contact, we recommend that you eat at your desk, outdoors or other designated break areas and locations to minimize extended periods of multiple employees eating within the same communal space.

Remember that communal food sharing has the potential to spread illness. Options include staggering mealtimes to reduce indoor (and outdoor) seating capacity. Practice good hygiene by washing your hands before eating, as well as cleaning and sanitizing your food preparation surfaces and high-touch areas.

Additional CDC guidance on eating and small gatherings states:

There is no evidence that handling or eating food spreads COVID-19, but it is always important to follow food safety practices.

- Encourage guests (employees) to bring food and drinks for their household.
- Limit people going in and out of the food preparation areas.
- Have one person serve all the food.
- Use single-use options, like salad dressings, food containers, plates and utensils, and condiments.
- Limit crowding in areas where food is served.
- Offer no-touch trash cans for guests to easily throw away food items.
- Wash dishes in the dishwasher or with hot soapy water immediately following the gathering.

STAY WELL: HEALTH PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS



FEVER



SORE THROAT



COUGH



SHORTNESS OF BREATH

Monitoring Yourself for Symptoms

It is crucial that we work together to mitigate risk for all. Every day before coming to work, please take a moment to monitor yourself for symptoms of COVID-19 or any other illness. The Penn State Go app has a [COVID symptom checker](#) for your convenience. If you have any of the symptoms listed below, you must stay home or leave work immediately if on campus, notify your supervisor, and contact Occupational Medicine at (814) 863-8492.

The information in the following sections on COVID-19 symptoms, risks, and precautions is based upon guidance provided on the [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention website](#). We recommend that you seek further guidance from the resources posted on the Penn State [Return to Work Website](#).

Symptoms to check for:

A variety of symptoms have been associated with COVID-19, and their impact has ranged from mild to severe. Some of these symptoms may appear 2–14 days after exposure to the virus:

- Fever above 100°F, or feeling unusually hot (if no thermometer is available), accompanied by shivering/chills
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Runny nose or new nasal congestion
- Difficulty breathing/shortness of breath
- Diarrhea, with or without respiratory symptoms
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Headache
- Generally feeling unwell, fatigue, and/or muscle aches
- New loss of taste or smell

This list is not comprehensive. As with any illness, please consult your medical provider if you are experiencing other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you. Do not report to work if you are not feeling well. [Penn State Absence Management](#) offers guidance for employees and supervisors related to COVID-19 and absences from work.

If you are vaccinated for COVID-19 and have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you do not need to quarantine but you must be tested two to five days following exposure. However, if you are not vaccinated for COVID-19 and you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should stay home, notify your supervisor, and contact Occupational Medicine at (814) 863-8492. Staff who may have been exposed to the virus at work will be contacted by Penn State Occupational Medicine if they are identified as a close contact. OPP has specific protocol to properly clean and disinfect areas suspected of contamination with COVID-19 and will enact them as needed.

STAY WELL: HEALTH PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS



**FREQUENT
HAND WASHING**



**WEARING FACE
COVERING
OR MASK**

Stay Masked - Stay Home - Stay Clean - Stay Covered

Help our community stay well and decrease the spread of COVID-19. Make these behaviors part of your routine:

- Stay home if you are sick or experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.
- Wear a cloth face covering or mask in shared spaces at all times while on campus.
- Wash hands frequently or use alcohol-based (at least 60% alcohol) hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces including your keyboard, phone, and other items.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your inner elbow.
- Throw out used tissues immediately and wash your hands.

Testing, Contact Tracing, and Monitoring

The University is employing strategies to create an effective detection and management system for all campuses, including testing, contact tracing, and monitoring and reacting to trends in data at the community and national levels. For the latest information on testing protocol, visit Penn State [Virus Info website](#). The [contact tracing program](#) will leverage and scale-up existing contact tracing protocols in place at the University.

Masking

The University currently requires that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, are expected to wear masks inside buildings and on public transportation. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals are not currently required to wear masks or practice physical distancing while outside.

In alignment with this CDC guidance, Penn State requires both non-vaccinated and vaccinated individuals to wear masks inside University buildings at all times.

For more information on masking, EHS has created guidance and HR has a formal policy on the practice. Cloth face coverings should meet the following criteria:

STAY WELL: HEALTH PRACTICES FOR INDIVIDUALS



- Fit snugly but comfortably against the sides of the face and cover the nose, mouth, and chin
- Fasten securely with ties or ear loops
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be able to be laundered without damage or change to shape

Hand Washing

Wash your hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with greater than 60% ethanol when soap and water are not available, or 70% isopropanol in healthcare settings.

Disinfecting Your Workspace

OPP routinely cleans all campus buildings in accordance with CDC guidelines utilizing standard cleaning procedures and targeted disinfecting to kill the coronavirus. OPP cleaning guidance is available on the EHS COVID-19 website for cleaning resources.

But we all need to do our part to wipe down personal work surfaces and commonly touched areas to stop the spread of illness and protect ourselves and others. Please use EPA approved disinfectants, following the manufacturer's application procedures and referencing the safety data sheet for the associated hazards and required PPE. Regular cleaning decreases the amount of the virus that causes COVID-19 on surfaces and objects, which reduces the risk of exposure. You are urged to wipe down your workspace at the start and end of every work shift. Frequent cleaning of surfaces and objects touched by multiple people (e.g., tables, doorknobs, light switches, counter tops, handles, touch screens, printer/copiers, and coffee makers) is important.

Well-Being as We Transition

Penn State has an ongoing commitment to your well-being and health. Please remember there are resources available to support you during this time.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)



The EAP is a free resource that provides benefits-eligible employees and their family members with access to counseling and advising services for a variety of health-related needs.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE FUND (EAF)



The EAF is open to all Penn State employees and provides financial assistance to those facing a wide range of personal or family hardships who have no other sources of funds available. Employees may submit an application (found on the [EAF website](#)) via email to assistancefund@psu.edu.

WELLNESS RESOURCES



Health Advocate provides over 80 free courses, personal growth resources, and professional development training.

The [Learning Resource Network](#) provides hundreds of courses, including wellness modules on mindfulness, managing stress, and more.

Websites & Contact Information

PENN STATE COVID-19 WEB RESOURCES

Penn State Coronavirus Information

virusinfo.psu.edu/

Keep Teaching Website

keepeteaching.psu.edu/

Human Resources COVID-19 web page

hr.psu.edu/covid-19-coronavirus

Environmental Health and Safety

ehs.psu.edu/covid19

Return to Work website

sites.psu.edu/returntowork/

Office of the Physical Plant

www.opp.psu.edu

Return to Research web page

www.research.psu.edu/COVID_return_research

CONTACT INFORMATION

Human Resources Services

(814) 865-1473

Absence Management

(814) 865-1782

absence@psu.edu

Affirmative Action Office

(814) 863-0471

aa@psu.edu

OTHER COVID-19 WEB RESOURCES

Pennsylvania Department of Health

www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx

Center for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html