COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Health Behaviors

Guidance #2: Classrooms, Research Spaces, and Common Area Social Distancing and Density

The Health and Wellness Working Group has created guidance, which has been informed by evidence-based science and/or expert opinions. This guidance covers most situations and will be revised as our understanding of COVID-19 and situational awareness changes. In places where specific suggestions for applying the guidance are made, it is understood that this is not always feasible and that individual units have to make decisions that are within the spirit of the guidance about how best to operationalize the guidance.

This guidance is intended to decrease the risk of disease spread but cannot eliminate all risk. This guidance may be used on and off campus as applicable, and we encourage university partners, affiliated organizations and off-campus student housing to consider these as well.

Social Distancing and Density Key Points

UT Austin

- Educate the campus community on proper social distancing and hygiene protocols.
- Ensure social distancing (at least 6 feet). For example, clearly mark unavailable areas and manage high-traffic transition periods.
- Manage density: Permit those whose jobs allow it to work from home, stagger research and other schedules to enable social distancing, and prioritize research access to those who need it most.
- Clean all classrooms, research spaces and common areas regularly.
- Those using research spaces should have a way to document their presence to allow for contact tracing efforts.
- Limit elevator occupancy to maintain social distancing.

All of Us

- Wash your hands well and often.
- Carry your own hand sanitizer and surface wipes.
- No food/drink in classrooms, as masking would be interrupted.

Overview

In drafting this guidance, a key resource is The American College Health Association’s (ACHA) Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era.

- “The high touch, highly interactive, mobile, densely populated living and learning environment typical of most campuses is the exemplar of a congregate setting with multiple risk factors for ready transmission of COVID-19.” (1)
- “Meticulous adherence to public health practices including hand hygiene, physical distancing, proper cough/sneeze etiquette, frequent disinfection of common and high traffic areas, symptom assessment, temperature checks, and face covering in public is the campus’ new normal. This should be widely communicated to students, employees and all campus visitors.” (1)
Recommendations

Classroom settings are vastly different across campus including fixed seating, movable desks, auditoriums and many others. The recommendations below will help colleges and schools determine the appropriate occupancy and density of classrooms in their buildings.

Classrooms will operate at roughly 20-40% capacity to accommodate social distancing. As a result, many small classrooms will be unusable for in-person classes, though they might be used for online classes with the instructors in the room. Assessment of classroom ventilation has ensured excellent ventilation of all classrooms, which is further enhanced by limiting capacity.

The Health and Wellness Working Group recommends the following for classrooms, research labs/spaces and common areas.

All Classroom Types

- Students may bring their own disinfectant wipes to sanitize their seating area; however, it should be recognized that aerosolized droplets are considered the primary form of contagion.
- Tape or signage will be used to identify seats that cannot be occupied during the class.
- The primary goal is to decrease classroom density with sensitivity to the parallel impacts of groups meeting simultaneously. For example, when scheduling classrooms, it is important to consider restroom capacity and availability, hallway traffic impacts, doorway congestion, etc.
- No eating or drinking in classrooms.

Fixed Seating Auditoriums

- Occupancy for fixed seating classroom should be based on 100 square feet per person.
- Keep at least two empty seats (or approximately 6 feet separation) between occupants in any row.
- Alternate one row (or at least 6 feet separation whichever is greater) between occupants and stagger seats in each row (see Appendix for diagrams).
- Auditoriums could designate “even and odd row” class times.
  - One suggestion: When a class uses the same auditorium after another class, using the opposite rows for seating will decrease the possibility of exposure to occupants. (e.g., 10 a.m. classes use rows 1, 3, 5, 7, and the 11 a.m. class uses rows 2, 4, 6, 8, etc.). This will, however, make it difficult to have signage on seats that are not to be occupied.
- For auditoriums with two or more exits, designate specific doorways for entrance and exit to limit contact when entering or exiting the classroom.
- Mark designated empty seats with tape or paper to ensure occupants sit in appropriately distanced locations.
  - The recommendation is to use two different sticker decals (Longhorn and UT, for example) to designate the appropriate seats to sit in during that class period. As an example, all students in the first class would sit in a designated seat with the Longhorn sticker. In the next class, all students would sit in a designated seat with the UT sticker.
- Faculty may assign seats based on classroom diagram and inform students prior to the class start date to ensure the students understand their seating assignment.
  - For faculty who assign seats, faculty shall maintain seat assignments throughout the academic year for possible health reference.
  - We recognized that assigned seating might force more (but brief) contact between students while passing one another to reach a seat, but this is not considered close contact by CDC.
  - For large rooms with fixed seating, students should take their seats from the middle outward.
  - Faculty may choose not to assign seats if an alternative mechanism is identified that would aid in contact tracing (e.g., Poll Everywhere, Canvas or other technology at the beginning of class where each student could signify presence and seat location).
- Faculty shall assign entrance and exit doors for students based on seating assignments (i.e., students on the east side of the room enter door one and students on the west side of the room enter door two). This will decrease contact among students as they enter and exit class.
- When class ends, faculty should use appropriate protocol to dismiss occupants in orderly fashion row-by-row.
  - Classes will be dismissed by rows to minimize congestion exiting rooms.
Students and faculty should avoid gathering in hallways prior to the classroom opening. If the classroom is still occupied, all students and faculty should wait outdoors if possible and maintain social distancing until the classroom opens.

Movable Multi-Person Table and Chairs

- Occupancy for classrooms with movable chairs should be based on 80 square feet of space per person.
- Calculate the number of occupants per table that allows for 6 feet of distance between occupants at the same table.
- Also, ensure 6 feet of distance between chairs that are at different tables.
- Move all excess tables and chairs to the corner of the room, ensuring egress paths and exits are not blocked.
  - This should be performed prior to the start of the semester.
  - Excess furniture should be bundled/secured because it is not uncommon for students to grab an extra chair from a stack.
  - If classroom furniture is removed from the classroom, a designated storage area must be identified that does not inhibit building or classroom egress or violate any life safety code requirements.
- Faculty shall assign seats based on classroom diagram and inform students prior to the class start date to ensure the students understand their seating assignment.
  - Faculty shall maintain seat assignments throughout the academic year for possible health reference.
- Faculty shall assign entrance and exit doors for students based on seating assignments (e.g., students on the east side of room enter door 1 and students on the west side of the room enter door 2). This will decrease contact among students as they enter and exit class.
- When class ends, faculty should use appropriate protocol to dismiss occupants in orderly fashion row-by-row.
  - Classes will be dismissed by rows to minimize congestion exiting rooms.
  - Students and faculty should avoid gathering in hallways prior to classroom opening. If the classroom is still occupied, all students and faculty should wait outdoors or at least 6 feet apart from one another until the classroom opens.
  - Faculty will arrange desks as necessary after the class has ended to ensure proper distance protocols are maintained for the next class.

Movable Single-Person Desk

- Occupancy for classrooms with movable chairs should be based on 80 square feet of space per person.
- Arrange single-person desks to allow for 6 feet of distance in all directions of each desk. (Mark desk locations with floor dot to enable the correct location for future use.)
- Maintain appropriate distance (at least 6 feet) from the front of the classroom lecture area, if applicable, to the nearest desks.
- If faculty are going to assign seats based on the classroom diagram, the assignment should be provided to students prior to the class start date to ensure the students understand their seating assignment.
  - When assigned, faculty shall maintain seat assignments through all the academic year for possible health reference.
- Faculty shall assign entrance and exit doors for students based on seating assignments (i.e., students on the east side of the room enter door 1 and students on the west side of room enter door 2). This will decrease contact among students as they enter and exit class.
- When class ends, faculty should use appropriate protocol to dismiss occupants in orderly fashion row-by-row.
  - Classes will be dismissed by rows to minimize congestion exiting rooms.
  - Students and faculty should avoid gathering in hallways prior to classroom opening. If the classroom is still occupied, all students and faculty should wait outdoors or at least 6 feet apart from one another until the classroom opens.
  - Faculty will arrange desks as necessary after the class has ended to ensure proper distance protocols are maintained for the next class.

Research Labs/Spaces

- Allow access for researchers whose research cannot be conducted remotely (i.e., experimentalists), if it can be conducted safely under the proposed guidelines below.
• Prioritization of limited research space access determined by colleges/schools (Associate Deans for Research) in consultation with Vice President for Research.
• Social distancing (at least 6 feet) to be maintained between all people sharing a lab/research space.
• Limit the number of researchers within the research space to allow for the appropriate distance guidelines.
  o Baseline starting calculation for density is one person per 125 square feet of research space.
  o Spaces less than 125 square feet should be single-occupancy unless single-occupancy creates unacceptable risk such as need for a lab partner in case of emergency; further evaluation of the space or activity would be necessary.
  o Each space should be analyzed to ensure that 6 feet of social distancing is possible at all times. The square footage is meant to be a guideline, and individual labs may choose to more strictly enforce this based on their navigable space, nature of the activity, other risk mitigation strategies or other factors.
  o Each lab should develop a system that ensures occupancy guidelines are followed and observable to all who have access.
  o All should comply with the density requirements set forth by the VPR (refer to “Research Restart” plan).
  o Scheduled work shifts are encouraged to maintain social distancing within labs. Rotating laboratory staff and faculty to allow for reduced exposure (several days “on” and “off”) when possible is desirable while staying within the overall target workforce number limits established in the VPR’s “Research Restart” plan.
• Post laboratory schedules such that all lab members can easily see and adhere to allowed schedule.
• Working remotely is recommended to the extent possible for research activities such as computational research/coding, literature reviews, data analysis and writing.
• Allow for scheduled lab closures and communicate these times with environmental services to allow for sufficient cleaning and disinfection of lab spaces.
• Develop a process to document time and location while in the research space so that contact tracing is enhanced in the case that laboratory personnel test positive for COVID-19.
• Conduct research group meetings remotely whenever possible. When in-person meetings are necessary, conduct them in a space large enough to promote social distancing.

**Teaching Labs**

• To decrease physical presence of student in laboratories, identify experiment instruction time or demonstrations that could be shown online in preparation for laboratory activities.
• Reinforce the utilization of face coverings, 6 feet of physical distancing, cough/sneeze etiquette and proper hand hygiene at the beginning of each laboratory session. Include instructions to students on the course-specific physical distancing protocol.
• Remind students to avoid touching their faces, including their eyes, noses and mouths, particularly until they have thoroughly washed their hands upon completing work and/or removing personal protective equipment (PPE).
• Provide hand sanitizer and enhanced cleaning protocols during and in between classes. Place handwashing stations or hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene.
• Supplement social distancing with Type II surgical masks. This type of face covering can lower exposure risk but does not eliminate exposure OR remove the requirement of social distancing.
• Keep a monitoring log of students who participated in each lab session that includes student report of symptom check prior to entry. If a student participant contracts COVID-19, follow the protocols established by the CDC and UT Austin. Close off and decontaminate any areas used by the student with an EPA-recommended disinfectant ensuring contact time is completed. Contact EHS to assist with decontamination.
• Installation of barriers (plexiglass shields) between students does not remove social distancing requirements. Configure communal work environments so that students are spaced at least 6 feet apart.
• Modify the alignment of workstations, if feasible, so that students are at least 6 feet apart in all directions (e.g., side-to-side and when facing one another), when possible. Ideally, modify the alignment of workstations so that students do not face one another. Consider using markings and signs to remind students to maintain their location at their station away from each other and practice social distancing when away from their workstation.
• Encourage single-file movement with a 6-foot distance between each student through the laboratory, where possible. Plan room flow as one way. Identify entry and exit doors to avoid students crossing paths.
• Provide visual cues (e.g., floor markings, signs) as a reminder to maintain social distancing.
• Face shields can provide additional protection from both potential process-related splashes and potential person-to-person droplet spread.

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• Utilize face shield when the combination of safety glasses with masks or cloth face coverings causes the safety glasses to fog up.
  - Face shields can help minimize contamination of masks and cloth face coverings.
  - If used, face shields should be cleaned and decontaminated after each class, and when not in use, they should be kept in a clean location.
  - If used, face shields should also wrap around the sides of the wearer’s face and extend below the chin.
  - Provide a disposable face covering when experiments have the potential to contaminate a student cloth face covering and face shields are not required/provided.
• Establish a process for teaching assistants and faculty to circulate through laboratory when students are conducting experiments if needed. Evaluate need and feasibility based on the experiment’s risk, laboratory infrastructure (such as aisle width), and PPE use. Establish a protocol for impromptu student and teaching assistants/faculty discussions (such as a move to a pre-planned, designated location to allow for social distancing).
• Evaluate options for students to obtain experiment supplies. Identify student routes from workstation to supplies and return while maintaining social distancing. If or when congestion occurs while obtaining supplies, conduct pre-class supply distribution to student workstations or find alternatives to maintain social distancing.
• Establish protocols and provide supplies to increase the frequency of sanitization in work, experiment and common spaces/equipment. Identify cleaning practices before, during and after each class (include shared laboratory equipment). Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces before and after each class. Disinfect frequently touched surfaces with an approved EPA registered disinfectant. The protocol must include a list of PPE needed when utilizing the disinfectant.
• Remove existing fabric lab coats. Utilize disposable lab coats and assign them to each student. Consider using large brown paper bags for students to take and store lab coats between classes. Identify and communicate methods for the student to turn in damaged lab coats requiring replacement or replacement of lost lab coats.
• When using a UV light for disinfection of shared equipment (i.e., goggles), require users of shared equipment to disinfect prior to use. NOTE: The Health and Wellness Working Group advises against use of shared equipment whenever possible.
• Plan communication methods when an instructor is required to “project” their voice to students. A face shield is not an appropriate (single) control as this activity results in an increased aerosol generation rate and resulting airborne spread. Utilize laboratory ventilation, electronic devices (microphone, voice recognition software, etc.), and different venues to assist in controlling exposure during instruction.
• Communicate to students a departmentally identified mechanism to report COVID-19 teaching laboratory concerns. Each teaching laboratory department must identify an individual with responsibility and authority to make changes based on student identified COVID-19 concerns.
• Certain departments may require specific modifications/variances/procedures. Provided below is an example developed by the School of Nursing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Level 1 – Social Distancing</th>
<th>Precautions</th>
<th>Level 2 – Proximity – Non-Contact</th>
<th>Precautions</th>
<th>Level 3 – Proximity – Contact</th>
<th>Precautions</th>
<th>References</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N224</td>
<td>Assessing markers or observation</td>
<td>Standard + Surgical Mask</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Work in pairs – contact</td>
<td>Contact &amp; Droplet</td>
<td>TX DHS PS Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>N127/1</td>
<td>Assessing markers or observation</td>
<td>Standard + Surgical Mask</td>
<td>Work in pairs with mankin non-contact</td>
<td>Droplet</td>
<td>Work in pairs – contact</td>
<td>Contact &amp; Droplet</td>
<td>WHO Standard Precautions in Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N157/1</td>
<td>Assessing markers or observation</td>
<td>Standard + Surgical Mask</td>
<td>Work in pairs with mankin non-contact</td>
<td>Droplet</td>
<td>Work in pairs – contact</td>
<td>Contact &amp; Droplet</td>
<td>CDC Contact Precautions</td>
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<tr>
<td>N300F</td>
<td>Assessing markers or observation</td>
<td>Standard + Surgical Mask</td>
<td>Work in pairs with mankin non-contact</td>
<td>Droplet</td>
<td>Work in pairs – contact</td>
<td>Contact &amp; Droplet</td>
<td>Droplet Precautions</td>
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<td>N300U</td>
<td>Advanced Health Assessment</td>
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<td>Standard + Surgical Mask</td>
<td>Work in pairs with mankin non-contact</td>
<td>Droplet</td>
<td>Work in pairs – contact</td>
<td>Contact &amp; Droplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Level 1 – Course sections doubled * Levels 2 & 3 normal schedule
**Precautions
 1. Standard & Surgical Mask
 2. & 3: Droplet Standard (potential clothing transfer) & Surgical Mask

Student to Student Lab Exercises

• Lab exercises such as nursing, kinesiology and medical that require student to student contact shall utilize industry accepted professional COVID-19 developed practices when social distancing cannot be achieved.
  o Example: Lab exercises representing physical therapy type evaluations can utilize the American Physical Therapy Association COVID-19 resources for patient contact and/or utilize any CDC specific guides for similar lab activities.

Office Space

• Single-occupant hard-walled offices with operable doors are capable of maintaining appropriate safety requirements without a face covering for the occupant by closing the door and limiting others to enter the office space.
• All employees that work in shared office spaces and are currently working remotely should continue to work remotely as long as their primary job functions are capable of doing so.
• Employers should consider alternating work schedules of employees that utilize shared work spaces (e.g., Employee A works Monday, Wednesday and Friday on campus, and employee B works remotely those days).
• Employees with shared office spaces that must return to work should adhere to the following requirements:
  o When possible, create at least 6 feet of separation between work areas and provide temporary barriers. Ensure barriers are at least 18 inches from the ceiling height to avoid blocking fire protection equipment.
  o All employees working in a shared office space must wear a face covering at all times unless eating or drinking when they are inside the building.
  o Employees or custodial services should clean and disinfect their work space every day after use.

Elevators

• A maximum of three people shall use an elevator at one time depending on the size of the elevator. Otherwise signage and marking should designate capacity.
• Faculty, staff and students should be encouraged to use the stairs if applicable.
• When inside the elevator, create as much space between other people by moving to the corners of the elevator and consider facing away from others.

Other Common Areas

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Standing areas, waiting rooms/areas, and common areas should calculate occupancy capacity based on 64 square feet of space per person.

All common indoor areas in buildings will post occupancy levels to ensure proper distancing and protect against contamination and virus spread.

Maintain a minimum of 6 feet distance between all people when traveling to and from class.

Restrooms

- Employees are required to wash their hands. Trash cans will be placed near doors to encourage employees to open the door with the paper towel used to dry their hands.
- For smaller restrooms, utilize the “one in one out” model. Signs will be placed on the door instructing occupants on the new guidelines.
  - “One in one out”: Call out when entering a restroom, and if someone else is already inside, exit and wait outside the restroom for that person to leave before re-entering.
- For large restrooms that may accommodate social distancing, mark off every other sink, shower, stall and/or urinal as necessary. Placing signage on urinals and stall doors designating them as “closed” to keep appropriate distancing between occupants.
- Building Managers shall evaluate their building’s restrooms and place signage outside restroom doors communicating the locations of the next available restroom spaces in their buildings.

Break Rooms/Eating Spaces

- Limit occupancy to allow for social distancing of at least 6 feet. Given that face coverings are incompatible with eating and drinking, occupancy limits may need to be more stringent in these spaces.
- Promote hand washing before and after eating.
- Encourage those with access to private office space to eat there.
- Ask individuals to clean the eating area (e.g., wipe down the table or counter space) after use.
- Avoid use of shared utensils, condiments and other items.
Student and Faculty Outreach/Training

- An interactive training video will be developed to help communicate the social distancing protocols, personal hygiene recommendations and face covering requirements the university has implemented.
- Prior to the start of the semester, all faculty, staff and students will be required to view the video to ensure all campus constituents understand the requirements.

Units hosting activities not covered under this guidance should develop applicable policies that best mitigate COVID-19 risk within their respective space. These policies may be submitted to the Health and Wellness Working Group, Health Behaviors – Guidelines Task Force for review and consultation.

References


CDC - Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities

CDC - Considerations for Institutes of Higher Education
Appendix: Classroom Setup Examples
CMA 3.114 University Classroom
48 students seats + 1 teacher seat

Minimum 6 Feet Distance

Teaching Console

Projection Screen

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Current Classroom Setup

Modified Classroom Setup

Minimum 6 Feet

BMC 4.212 Classroom
40 student seats + 1 teacher seat

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