

## Spring 2023 COVID-19 Plans

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# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Dear Faculty and Staff,

As we prepare to launch the Spring 2023 semester, I'd like to share updates related to COVID-19. The COVID-19 planning group has been meeting to discuss Spring 2023 plans and, as always, we are consulting with Hartford HealthCare and our CT and NESCAC peers.

**Current COVID- 19 Strain:** As we go into this next semester, we continue to have COVID-19, flu and other respiratory illnesses in our midst. There is a new COVID-19 variant (XBB.1.5) that is an Omicron subvariant that is spreading across the United States. This is more transmissible than previous variants, but thus far this strain does not appear to cause more severe disease. Similar to other Omicron variants, it causes milder illness compared to Delta.

**Bivalent Booster:** The current bivalent booster is an important tool to help protect you against severe illness. If you have not yet been vaccinated with the bivalent booster, the College highly recommends that you be vaccinated. The [CT Vaccine Portal](#) can be a valuable resource in identifying locations where you can access the bivalent booster.

**Mask Wearing When Ill:** Throughout the pandemic, masks have proven to be important in helping to prevent spreading upper respiratory infections. As a result, if you have **any symptoms** that could be related to an upper respiratory infection (e.g. flu or COVID), you should wear a mask right away so that you don't spread the illness to others. You should test for COVID and/or seek medical attention to help determine the cause of your symptoms.

**Mask Wearing When Not Ill:** If you are not ill but would like to protect yourself from catching a virus from others, you also may choose to wear a mask. In our discussions with Hartford HealthCare medical staff, we learned that recent research on mask wearing shows that properly wearing an N95 or KN95 mask lowers the odds of infection by 83%. Fit is important—if properly fitted, these masks should filter at least 95% of virus particles.

As we go into this semester, individuals who are not actively sick may choose to wear a mask. People's circumstances are different and therefore will lead to different choices in a variety of settings on whether to wear masks. As a result, it is important that our campus

remain mask-friendly, as many individuals may choose to wear masks in a variety of spaces. If you are meeting with a person who is wearing a mask, you may want to ask whether they would like you to also wear a mask—**always carry a mask so you are prepared to wear it if requested** by another person or if you enter a person's office, room or work space where they prefer that a mask be worn. You may communicate to people entering your room or workspace that you would like them to wear a mask by posting this [sign](#).

In classes, meetings, workshops etc. the faculty, staff, or student facilitator may require to have the group of participants mask. If a participant would like to request that the group wear a mask they should meet with the facilitator so that they can discuss the request.

Beyond these circumstances masks are required in Warnshuis waiting area for Student Health Services and Student Counseling Services and in Student Health Services exam rooms.

**Mask Availability:** KN95 masks are available in Student Health Services, Office of Student Life (Cro 218), Human Resources, Dean of the Faculty Office, Unity House, Harris Dining Hall and Shain Library Circulation Desk.

**Test Availability:** We have a limited number of tests available for faculty, staff and students to use when symptomatic or on Day 5 from close contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19. These tests are available for faculty and staff at Human Resources and in the Student Life Office (Cro 218). These tests are not to be used for travel or other personal reasons. Rapid antigen tests are also available at local stores and you can also order up to four free test kits through the federal government's website - [covidtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov)

**Testing Positive for COVID-19:** If an employee tests positive with COVID-19 from a rapid antigen test or other off-campus diagnosis, **you must notify the College by sending an email to [covidhr@conncoll.edu](mailto:covidhr@conncoll.edu)**. Employees will receive instructions from a member of the Human Resources staff.

- Employees can pick up an isolation kit (containing KN95 masks and rapid tests) from Human Resources or Student Life Office (Cro 218).
- The recovery period can be between five and 10 days (Day 0 is the day the COVID-19 test was taken). A **single** negative test between Day 5 and Day 10 will enable you to return to work. Please send a picture of your negative test result to [covidhr@conncoll.edu](mailto:covidhr@conncoll.edu). **Once you submit the picture you can return to work—you do not need to wait for a response.** If you complete the recovery before 10 days, you should continue to take precautions (e.g. wear a well-fitting mask around other people) until Day 10.
- It is recommended that you notify people who you identify as being a close contact. A person is considered a close contact if they have been within six feet of you for 15 minutes or more during what is considered the infectious period, which is 48 hours prior to positive diagnosis or onset of symptoms.

**If Identified as a Close Contact:** You may hear directly from a person with COVID-19 that they tested positive and that you are a close contact. Close contacts should test with a rapid antigen test on Day 5 from their last contact with the positive person and should test if they begin to experience symptoms at any time within 14 days of the close contact. Close contacts are also expected to consistently wear a mask and should watch symptoms for 10 days from their last close contact with the positive person.

**Visitors to Campus:** All campus buildings are open to visitors and full-capacity attendance is permitted indoors for events and other gatherings. Proof of vaccination or testing is not required for visitors though it is recommended they be vaccinated for COVID-19 (initial two dose series and booster). The College asks that all visitors perform a self-screening for COVID-19 symptoms. If a visitor has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they should take

a rapid antigen (at-home/over the counter) test before coming to campus. If the test is positive, they should not come to campus. If the test is negative, they are welcome to come to campus, but given the symptoms they should wear a KN95 mask or the equivalent.

What seems clear is that COVID-19, with its many variants, will be with us for the foreseeable future. The good news is that the virus, while more communicable, causes less severe symptoms for those who are fully vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and there are also effective drugs available to treat those who become infected. As noted earlier, a well-fitting KN95 mask or the equivalent provides protection from the virus even when others are not masked.

Our plans for this Spring continue to move us closer to more typical operations on our campus with tools available to respond to COVID-19 as needed. As noted at the start of the academic year, we have all recognized that the past three years have contributed to greater isolation, which has been challenging for all of us and, in particular, students as they pursue their college education. It is therefore critical to not only focus on physical health but also mental health. One of the many strategies we are implementing in this area is returning to as close to normal a Connecticut College education and overall experience as possible.

As we know, circumstances can change and we will adjust accordingly, but we anticipate these plans will guide us through the coming Spring semester. We will continue to communicate with the campus as necessary, and the [Path Forward](#) COVID-19 website will have updated information for the start of the semester.

Thank you, and we look forward to enjoying a successful spring semester together.

Sincerely,

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