



# COVID Safety Plan

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# ACRONYMS

<b>ACGC</b>	Angel Cabrera Global Center
<b>CDC</b>	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<b>EMR</b>	Electronic Medical Record
<b>EHS</b>	Environmental Health & Safety Office
<b>HRL</b>	Housing & Residence Life
<b>COVID</b>	Novel Coronavirus
<b>OMMT</b>	Mason’s Outbreak Mitigation and Management Team
<b>SEERM</b>	Safety, Emergency, & Enterprise Risk Management
<b>SHS</b>	Student Health Services
<b>VDH</b>	Virginia Department of Health
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# INTRODUCTION

George Mason University (Mason) is Virginia's largest public research university serving more than 37,000 students. The university has a significant footprint in the northern Virginia region with three campuses located in Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William Counties and multiple instructional sites throughout the region. The university also has a campus in Northeast Asia, Mason Korea. George Mason University's guiding principle is to support the health, safety, and well-being of the Mason community. This principle has guided planning throughout the novel coronavirus (COVID) pandemic and is balanced with fulfilling the university's mission as an innovative and inclusive academic community committed to creating a more just, free, and prosperous world.

In response to public health concerns surrounding the COVID pandemic, Mason transitioned to virtual instruction on March 23, 2020, and implemented a telework policy for faculty and staff. Under the previous Executive Order 55 *Temporary Stay at Home Order Due to Novel Coronavirus (COVID)*, the university continued to operate in a limited capacity in accordance with public health recommendations to facilitate remote learning, critical research, and other functions deemed essential. Once the *Safer at Home* order was lifted for Northern Virginia on June 11, 2020, Mason eased restrictions and began the Fall 2020 semester on time, offering a mix of in-person and hybrid instruction and expanded online classes, as well as the continued advancement of research. Throughout the academic year, Mason continued to deliver quality education while successfully managing the pandemic in a manner that realized relatively low cases on campus and no disruption to pandemic-adjusted operations.

The plan provided structure for continued instruction and campus operations and outlines risk-mitigation strategies for the Mason community that include behavioral expectations and practices, engineering controls, protective equipment and policies and procedures consistent with best public health practices. These precautions addressed the mixed community of people who are not fully vaccinated and those who are fully vaccinated, and account for risk factors for exposure such as proximity (e.g., time and space) and behavior (e.g., physical distancing) with attention to individual risk of infection (e.g., susceptibility). In the spring of 2022, Mason offered in-person instruction and held in-person activities on all Mason campuses. In the fall of 2022, Mason suspended all COVID precautions with the exception of mask requirements in clinical settings and requirements to report COVID illnesses using Mason COVID Health Check. In the spring 2023, no COVID precautions are required with the exception of masks in clinical settings; Mason COVID Health Check is only required to consent to COVID testing at Mason; and Mason's COVID governance structure is suspended.

This *COVID Safety Plan* was developed in consultation with relevant state and federal recommendations and requirements will evolve as circumstances develop and/or as new information or revised guidance becomes available from federal, state, and local officials and public health experts. The university is in regular communication with local government agencies and public health departments, as well as health and safety colleagues at peer institutions and will update the plan as needed.

## Governance

The Associate Vice President for Safety, Emergency, & Enterprise Risk Management serves as the university's COVID Director responsible for implementing the *COVID Safety Plan*. All plans for the Spring are reviewed and approved by Senior Leadership

## Integration with State and Local Public Health Agencies

Mason's broad operational footprint in the Northern Virginia region has led to the establishment of collaborative relationships with local public health departments and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). These relationships support the care and treatment of Mason's student population in collaboration with Mason's Student Health Services (SHS), as well as the development and implementation of operational health and safety procedures to support Mason's faculty, and staff and contractors in collaboration with Mason's Safety, Emergency, & Enterprise Risk Management (SEERM) team.

The university has leveraged these relationships with local public health departments and VDH when developing Mason policies and procedures. Mason's Outbreak Mitigation and Management Team (OMMT), comprised of SEERM, SHS, and Human Resources as well as public health officials from Fairfax County Health Department meet weekly to review cases and identify potential outbreaks.

## Affiliates

Affiliates of the University are expected to follow the public health and safety precautions outlined in this plan for university employees.

# CULTURE OF ADHERENCE TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- All faculty, staff, students, contractors, affiliates, and visitors are required to comply with the policies and procedures outlined in this plan and all of Mason's health and safety plans, as relevant for their classification. Faculty, staff, and students who do not comply with the university's public health and safety precautions may be asked to leave the work area, classroom, or building.
- Noncompliance with Mason's health and safety plans to include this *COVID Safety Plan* may result in disciplinary action in accordance with DHRM Policy 1.60, "Standards of Conduct," the applicable handbook for employees, or University policy. Employees may face disciplinary action, be placed on unpaid leave, or have their position terminated.
- Students who are noncompliant with Mason's health and safety plans to include this *COVID Safety Plan* may be subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct.

## Signs and Postings

The university has posted signs and reminders for public health and safety precautions in prominent areas on all campuses. An example of signage is shown in Figure 1.

- The signs on campus are intended to communicate to all members of the university community the recommended and optional precautions and procedures that should be observed.
- Signs are posted in key locations visible to visitors, faculty, staff, and students, including (but not limited to) the following: building entrances, classrooms, and event spaces.
- The content of signs varies slightly but includes specific information people need to know for the location where the sign is posted.

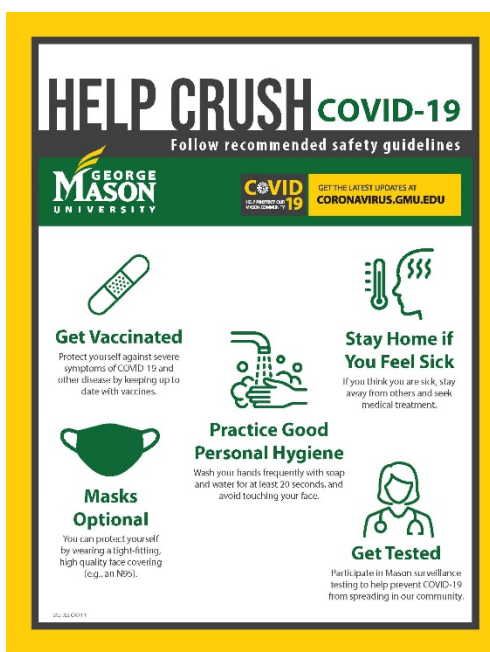


Figure 1. Example of COVID Signage

## Training

Job-specific training for employees working in health care settings or in jobs identified as having a high risk of infection and refresher training are provided when determined to be necessary.

# PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

## COVID Vaccination

COVID vaccination is the leading prevention strategy to protect individuals from COVID infection and end the COVID pandemic. People who are up to date are at low risk of

symptomatic or severe infection, and evidence suggests that people who are up to date are less likely to have asymptomatic infection or transmit the virus that causes COVID to others. Vaccine appointments are widely available in Virginia and are offered free of charge. Individuals can schedule a COVID vaccination appointment at George Mason University [here](#).

A person is considered to be up to date after they have received the final dose of COVID vaccine (second dose for Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novovax; one dose for Johnson & Johnson [J&J]/Janssen), or World Health Organization (WHO) approved vaccine series), and all recommended booster shots when eligible.

- Mason will continue to host vaccination clinics on campus at no cost through Spring 2023. Appointments are available at [vaccine.gmu.edu](https://vaccine.gmu.edu).
  - All faculty, staff, and students are strongly encouraged to receive COVID vaccinations and boosters and upload their vaccination documentation through [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#).
  - In accordance with CDC guidance, Mason offers flexible excused absence options for students receiving vaccination and those with side effects after vaccination.
  - In accordance with CDC guidance, Mason offers flexible, supportive options to obtain the vaccination and sick leave options for employees with side effects after International travelers: Per [CDC Guidance](#), Non-U.S. Citizens e.g. International Students must receive COVID vaccination, with limited exceptions, before travel to the United States and must follow CDC guidance for International Travel. Mason will provide COVID testing for students.
  - Students who need additional vaccinations (Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis (Tdap), Measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), Meningococcal, and Hepatitis B) or tuberculosis (TB) screening should contact SHS for information about scheduling these vaccinations.
- Privacy:
  - Faculty and staff may not ask other faculty, staff, students, contractors, affiliates, or visitors their vaccination status.
  - Exceptions to this policy will be made in circumstances when proof of vaccination is required to participate in an activity (e.g., visiting a location, or housing vulnerable populations)

## Face Coverings

- [University Policy 1415 COVID Public Health and Safety Precautions – Face coverings](#) establishes university requirements for wearing face coverings in accordance with [CDC guidance](#). All faculty, staff, students, contractors, employees of contractors, visitors and any other individual on university property aged 2 or older must follow Policy 1415 and [CDC guidance for face coverings](#) while on University Property.
- Mason supports anyone who chooses to wear a face covering in a situation where it is not required and encourages the use of masks when indoors.

## Standard Hygiene Practices

The following personal hygiene practices should be followed by everyone regardless of vaccination status.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap is not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and follow up with soap and water as soon as you are able. It is especially important to wash your hands before eating or preparing food or touching your face and after leaving a public place, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, using the restroom, handling your face covering, and caring for someone who is sick.
- Mason provides hand-washing facilities and/or hand sanitizing stations for employees to use in shared spaces.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes. Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash your hands.
- Follow cleaning and disinfecting procedures as outlined below.

## Building Ventilation

In accordance with guidelines from the CDC and the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), George Mason University will continue to operate heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in all buildings to provide increased ventilation rates through the end of the Spring Semester. The current recommended operational changes include:

- Building HVAC systems will operate for one hour prior to and two hours after normal occupancy to maximize building ventilation.
- Building HVAC systems are outfitted with air filters rated MERV 13 or higher possible, or with the highest rated air filters compatible with the HVAC system if it is not designed to accommodate MERV 13 filters.
- Ventilation systems in medical clinics or diagnostic testing facilities have been evaluated to confirm that air exchange rates in these areas meet the increased ventilation requirements for these spaces.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting Procedures

According to the CDC, the risk of infection from touching contaminated surfaces is low in most situations. The most reliable way to prevent infection from surfaces is to regularly wash hands or use hand sanitizer. Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces can also reduce the risk of infection. Mason provides enhanced cleaning and disinfection, in addition to other routine cleaning, in accordance with [CDC Guidance](#).

- High contact surfaces in common areas, dining areas, classrooms, residence halls recreation sport and exercise areas, and other public spaces in campus buildings are cleaned at least daily.
- Restaurant dining tables are cleaned routinely, and at least once per day.



- Exercise equipment, including game balls or other group sports equipment, should be cleaned by the user(s) after each use.
- Individual student bedrooms and in-suite bathrooms and kitchens are the responsibility of the occupants to clean.
- High touch surfaces within office spaces are the responsibility of employee occupants to clean.

## Mason COVID Health Check

The [Mason COVID Health Check](#) is used for consent for COVID testing. Students, faculty, and staff that desire to participate in at-will testing, as well as faculty and staff participating in diagnostic testing, must complete Mason COVID Health Check to access Mason's testing locations.

## COVID Testing

Mason will continue to provide at-will and diagnostic testing free of charge to students, faculty, and staff in the Spring of 2023.

- **Diagnostic Testing:** Per VDH guidelines, all symptomatic individuals should have access to expeditious diagnostic testing, either through on campus resources or a community testing site.
  - Any person (regardless of vaccination status) experiencing [COVID symptoms](#) should be tested.
  - Faculty, staff, and contractors are encouraged to seek testing at Mason.
  - All symptomatic students are encouraged to isolate, and call SHS to seek evaluation and diagnostic testing. All students actively enrolled at Mason, including students who do not have insurance, are eligible for services at SHS.
- **At-will Testing:** At-will testing is available on demand for students, faculty, and staff. Testing availability is subject to change and will evolve in response to changes in public health recommendations and demand.
  - Mason provides COVID test sites on each campus. A list of testing locations for each campus is available on the [COVID Testing website](#).
  - Individuals are strongly encouraged to utilize Mason's COVID test sites for their required testing.

Any positive COVID test obtained or collected on campus will trigger a notification to the individual regarding results. Additional information on testing is available on the [COVID Testing website](#).

## Isolation

Non-residential students, faculty and staff are instructed to isolate at home. Residential students who test positive for COVID or are suspected of having COVID will be asked to return to their off-campus residence for the duration of their isolation period if they reside within 100 miles of

campus and safety permits. Mason has reserved approximately 22 rooms in the Angel Cabrera Global Center (ACGC) as isolation space. The ACGC includes a residence hall with private bedrooms.

- All formal determinations of a student's requirement to isolate are made by SHS.
- In accordance with the CDC, people who have come into close contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID should be tested 6 days after exposure and wear a high quality, well-fitted mask when around others for 10 days after contact, even if the test on Day 6 is negative. They do not need to quarantine at home.
- Students who return home must vacate their on-campus assignment (if it is not isolation appropriate) within 4 hours after notification from HRL Staff. At that time, the student's Mason ID will be deactivated for their residence hall until they are approved to return by SHS. Students leaving campus should not use public transportation (taxi, ride share, bus, plane, train, or Mason Shuttle). Students should use their personal vehicle or be picked up by friends or family.
- The University will provide care for students in isolation.
  - Assistance obtaining meals will be provided as needed
  - Students should contact SHS if their symptoms worsen. Students will be provided a thermometer to assist with symptom monitoring
  - SHS will care for students in isolation via telehealth when possible, but will also conduct in-person evaluations in the clinic when medically necessary.
  - After hours, students have access to a nurse line which will follow SHS COVID protocols regarding isolation of residential students.
  - If students require a higher level of care, they will be referred to INOVA hospital or the nearest emergency room. Should a student be hospitalized, SHS will follow up with the patient and seek updates on the patient's status from hospital staff, with patient consent.
- SHS is responsible for determining when a student is able to be released from their isolation status and return to their permanent room assignment. Students will be able to return to their original space when the following occurs:
  - The student has completed the appropriate length of isolation as prescribed by SHS per CDC guidance and is able to safely meet any additional pertinent CDC guidance.
- SHS will notify the Senior Housing Professional Staff member when the student is cleared to be released from isolation.

## Case and Outbreak Management

Mason's OMMT continues to meet with the local health department on a routine basis to discuss Mason's COVID strategy. When outbreaks are suspected or identified, Mason collaborates with local health departments to implement interventions, testing, and outbreak management strategies as necessary.

# VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Unvaccinated people who are at [increased risk for severe illness](#) and those otherwise at risk (including individuals whose ability to have a full immune response to vaccination due to certain conditions such as a prior transplant, prolonged use of corticosteroids or condition that weakened the immune system) are encouraged to speak with their healthcare provider about precautions they can take to protect themselves from COVID.

- The university does not prohibit at-risk individuals from coming to campus; however, those at risk for severe illness are encouraged to take appropriate precautions to protect themselves.
- Individuals with weakened immune systems or who take immunosuppressive medications should talk to their healthcare providers to discuss their activities and precautions they may need to take to prevent COVID. The CDC recommends continued masking and physical distancing for people with weakened immune systems.
- Faculty and Staff at Increased Risk:
  - Human Resources & Payroll, in coordination with the ADA Coordinator where appropriate, will work with employees and supervisors in cases where it may be challenging to implement a requested accommodation, adjustment, or modification. Human Resources & Payroll will partner with the ADA Coordinator/Compliance, Diversity and Ethics, to address other concerns that may arise related to an employee's at-risk status.
- Students at increased risk:
  - Students who are recognized as high-risk per [CDC guidelines](#) should consult with their healthcare provider and work directly with [Disability Services](#) if accommodations, adjustments or modifications are needed.
- Students who would like additional support with online programs and services or additional academic assistance related to a high-risk condition(s) of a household member may contact the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) or the [Dean of Students Office](#).

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The university will continue to provide a wide range of mental health services for students, faculty, and staff.

- Mental health services for students will be delivered both in-person and virtually through [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) and SHS.
- Students will be able to access other in-person or virtual well-being focused programs through Mason's Center for the Advancement of Well-being, Student Involvement, and Mason Recreation.
- Faculty and staff enrolled in George Mason University healthcare plans have access to Employee Assistance Programs, which offer confidential assistance with personal, physical, psychological, and/or financial challenges. Employees and their dependents are eligible for up to four free sessions to address a variety of topics including, but not limited to, legal issues, housing insecurity, mental health, elder care, substance abuse and

grief counseling. Additional information can be found on the Virginia Department of Human Resource [Employee Assistance Program webpage](#).

- Human Resources and Payroll is offering and advertising a variety of workshops and programs for all faculty and staff (regardless of whether they are enrolled in the university's benefit programs) to support well-being.
- If you or anyone you know is experiencing a crisis, text "START" to 741741 (Crisis Text Line) or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to speak with a crisis counselor.

## Return to Work After Illness

Employees who are experiencing symptoms and have tested positive for COVID must be isolated at home and may not return to campus until day 6 after symptom onset (with symptoms onset being day 0). The employee must also have improved symptoms and it must be 24 hours since their fever has subsided without the use of fever-reducing medication. Employees must wear a mask whenever around others for an additional 5 days (days 6-10) after symptom onset.

Employees who are asymptomatic but have tested positive for COVID must isolate until days 6 after the test date (with the date of the test being day 0). If no symptoms develop, they may return to campus on day 6 and wear a mask whenever around others for an additional 5 days (days 6-10) after test date.

In both cases after a positive test result, continue masking whenever around others for a full 10 days after the start of symptoms or positive test date. You may also discontinue mask use if you have 2 negative antigen tests, 48 hours apart, with these tests starting on day 6. This may allow reduced isolation time to 8 days if both tests are negative. Continue to wear a mask if the antigen tests remain positive, including after 10 days.

Employees who have been in close contact with someone who tested positive need not quarantine if they are symptom free. They should wear a mask for 10 days and have a test on day 6 after close contact if possible unless the employee has tested positive in the past three months). If they test positive, they must isolate for 5 days (until day 6 with the test date being day 0). If they test negative, they should continue with diligent mask use around others for 10 days. These guidelines are subject to change in response to updates from public health department and the CDC. Please check most recent isolation and quarantine guidance [here](#).

## STUDENT LIFE

### Housing

All Mason residential and off-campus students are strongly encouraged to be up to date with COVID vaccination. On campus housing will be a community of both vaccinated and unvaccinated students.

- HRL is operating at normal capacity.

- Residential students seeking special housing accommodations for health-related concerns should utilize the Special Housing Accommodation process through Disability Services. Information about residence hall move-in is available [here](#).
- All residential students are strongly encouraged to participate in routine surveillance testing.

## Student Health Services

Mason SHS safely and efficiently manages patients by following guidelines from CDC, VDH and the American College Health Association and working closely with HRL, Environmental Health & Safety (EHS), ICA and other university partners to support efforts to mitigate COVID on campus and in the community. The following procedures are in place for students in need of medical services:

- Students are encouraged to call for appropriate COVID screening and determination of most appropriate appointment (in-person or telehealth).
- Patients are seen by appointment only in order to safely manage patient flow.
- Telehealth visits will be encouraged and utilized when appropriate.
- Diagnostic testing for COVID will occur within the clinic but primarily at a separate diagnostic testing facility to optimize safety and efficiency.
- Students are required to upload immunization records, per university policy via the electronic medical record (EMR) portal rather than dropping them off in person.
- Students and staff must wear face coverings [University Policy 1415 Public Health and Safety Precautions – Face coverings](#) while at SHS and in the adjacent waiting area.
- Students will have mobile check-in and should complete admission forms in the portal prior to appointments. Students arriving in-person will be directed by front desk personnel to the appropriate waiting area, with nursing triage as appropriate.
- Guests and visitors may not accompany students to appointments unless deemed medically or emotionally necessary.
- SHS staff will continue to evaluate and manage patients with positive COVID results, including the need for isolation. SHS will also advise residential students who are close contacts as to steps they are to take. SHS physician leadership will continue to provide medical and public health consultation to the university.