



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Kristina M. Johnson, PhD
President-elect



Dear Students, Faculty and Staff:

Move-in is always a very special time of year — one of great excitement, anticipation and emotion. This year presents us with many new challenges, but we are all rising to the occasion. I want to thank our Student Life staff, our volunteers from across campus and, most of all, our new and returning Buckeyes for their commitment to keeping each other safe. We will continue to support one another and stay focused on health and wellness, Together As Buckeyes!

On Aug. 11, I shared a number of enhanced safety measures as students, faculty and staff return to campus. These measures are informed by active monitoring and analyzing the most recent data and information on COVID-19 infections and transmission factors. These are uniquely challenging circumstances for our communities, and I appreciate your flexibility and understanding that you continue to demonstrate as part of the Buckeye family.

I'd like to share additional updates in the following areas:

- Face mask requirements, including limited indoor and outdoor exceptions;
- Metrics related to remaining on-campus operations during the autumn semester;
- Return-to-campus PPE safety kits, including pick-up locations for off-campus students;
- Further details on the university's testing and tracing strategy to keep our community safe.

Importantly, thank you for taking a few minutes to complete the required online training course and Together As Buckeyes Pledge. The course is available through [BuckeyeLearn](#). It covers expectations for daily health checks, personal protection such as face masks, hygiene, physical distancing and more. The pledge, which must be signed upon completion of the training, acknowledges an understanding of and commitment to the behaviors described in the training and represents our shared dedication to staying safe and healthy. Also, if you have not already been limiting contact with others, we request that you begin doing so before your arrival to campus.

Face mask requirements

Face masks help protect all members of our community from the virus. Masks are required to be worn in all indoor settings on our campuses, unless you are alone in the privacy of your room. Masks must also now be worn outdoors in settings on campus, even when individuals can maintain appropriate physical distancing.

Indoors or outdoors, exceptions are made for those dining, participating in strenuous exercise or taking part in performance-based classes as long as physical distancing can be maintained. As an added safety measure, open-air tents are being set up on campus for use by arts, dance and music classes as

well as certain courses with extended outdoor activities in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. Masks will not be required for classes in these open-air tents, again, as long as physical distancing can be maintained. Additionally, there is an exception for university staff working outdoors for long periods of time who are able to maintain appropriate physical distancing and have a mask available if needed.

For more, including why universal mask use is among the most effective ways to reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19, visit the [Safe and Healthy Buckeyes website](#).

Remaining on campus

To accomplish our collective goal of remaining on campus to teach, learn, research and take part in other activities, we must control the prevalence of the virus as measured by a range of qualitative and quantitative metrics. The positivity rate resulting from our testing program is one measure, but it is not the sole determinant of whether we remain on campus or return to all-virtual instruction. Any decision about adjusting our plans will be made on the totality of the facts, in consultation with public health authorities, and based on the latest science and data.

As a reminder, the university remains in a state of emergency, which we are extending through Saturday, Aug. 22, enabling us to utilize Disaster Leave ([Policy 6.28](#)).

Return-to-campus PPE safety kits

Roughly 78,000 return-to-campus PPE safety kits have been assembled with more than 34,000 delivered. The kits include one disposable mask, two reusable masks, a thermometer, disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer.

- For faculty and staff, kits are now available for ordering by departments, offices and units through the eStores program.
- For students living on campus, kits are provided as part of the move-in process.
- For all students living off campus, we are sharing today that kits can be picked up at locations listed on the [Safe and Healthy Buckeyes website](#).

Testing

We continue to refine, improve and expand our testing efforts because they are a critical component of a safe and healthy return to on-campus operations.

To ramp up our testing efforts as students return to the residence halls, we have expanded the surveillance testing program. All residential students must take a COVID-19 test as part of the move-in process.

Ohio State's surveillance testing program consists of mandatory weekly testing of all students at all ranks who live in residence halls or university-managed housing coupled with regular testing of random samples of asymptomatic undergraduate students who live off campus. Details about the weekly testing of residential students will be shared later in the week.

We will continuously monitor conditions in our community by testing for the prevalence of COVID-19 in the university population to inform our decision making. Regular testing also identifies people with COVID-19 who do not have symptoms, preventing further spread of the disease on campus and in the broader community.

Should there ever be a shortage of testing supplies, symptomatic individuals and members of at-risk or vulnerable populations will remain the highest priority for testing.

To ensure we are being good stewards of the limited reagents and equipment available for testing, we are taking multiple steps to reduce the use of supplies. We are partnering with the Wexner Medical Center and third-party provider Vault to work toward the use of “pool” testing, whereby multiple samples from five to 10 individuals can be evaluated for COVID-19 in a single test.

Our comprehensive testing strategy will allow for:

- Voluntary testing of asymptomatic faculty, staff, and graduate and professional students who live off campus;
- Targeted testing if COVID-19 hotspots are identified;
- Sharing of aggregate information in a way that protects individuals’ medical and educational privacy;
- Keeping university leaders and the public up to date about the virus’s spread and informing decision making throughout the semester.

Of course, testing is just one way we will limit the spread of COVID-19. We all must do our part to keep each other safe by wearing face masks, maintaining physical distancing, following signage in and around buildings, and frequently washing our hands.

Importantly, testing sets us up for robust contact tracing, which will help us further interrupt transmission of the virus by confirming that exposed individuals are quarantined and tested. Vigilance in testing and contact tracing will put us in the best position to make informed decisions about community health and safety, and adjust safety measures as needed.

Contact tracing

When someone on our campuses tests positive for COVID-19, the Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Team (CICCTT) will be handling this important work on behalf of our academic community (students, faculty and staff) and in partnership with Columbus Public Health and other health agencies. Contact tracing of Wexner Medical Center staff will be performed by Employee Health Services.

Contact tracers will talk to individuals who contract COVID-19 and then reach out as appropriate to others who may have come into close contact with them.

This work is guided by scientists from our College of Public Health to address those at risk of exposure. You can protect yourself in most instances if you follow these simple steps: 1) Wear a face mask and 2) maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance for any extended contact. If you do this, you will most likely not have close contact exposure and would therefore not need to be interviewed as part of the contact tracing process if someone you know gets sick.

Ohio State will follow best practices for contact tracing while maintaining the privacy of our university community, so we will not be notifying the general community about individual illnesses. We remain committed to sharing broad data with the university community, but this will not include information about specific cases.

More detail about our contact tracing process is available on the [Safe and Healthy Buckeyes website](#).

Finally, as many of us return to campus, let's think about the personal reasons that motivate us to do our part to keep each other safe and healthy. Why do we wear a mask? Why practice physical distancing? What's your why?

In speaking with several of you already, the answers range from concern for the health and well-being of vulnerable loved ones to just being able to walk across campus on a fall day to attend class or connect with a friend or colleague.

What's my why? I am committed to fighting the coronavirus and COVID-19 because I want to meet you in person. I look forward to the day when we will all once again join arms together and sing Carmen Ohio. Veronica and I are truly excited to call Ohio State home and embark on this journey with all of you, Together As Buckeyes.

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Sincerely yours,

Kristina M. Johnson, PhD

President-elect



COVID-19 Resources

- [Safe and Healthy Buckeyes information and guidance](#)
- [Information about coronavirus and the university's response](#)
- [Resources for faculty](#)
- [Resources for COVID-19 research](#)
- [Resources for students](#)
- [Resources for staff](#)

Wellness Resources

- Faculty and staff can use the [Human Resources Keep Well website](#), the [Chief Wellness Officer Health and Wellness page](#) and [Your Plan For Health](#).
- Students can use the [Counseling and Consultation Service](#) (CCS) and the [Buckeye Peer Access Line](#) (PAL), which will operate Monday through Thursday from 8 p.m. to midnight, and Friday from 2 to 6 p.m.
- CCS also provides guidance for [ways for faculty and staff to support students](#).
- The Ohio State: Wellness app is designed for students but offers tips and guidance useful for all members of our community. It is available for [Android](#) and [iOS](#) devices.



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