



The University of Texas at Austin College of Natural Sciences

Dear CNS Staff,

I know many of you are worried about the current health situation and its impact for our work together. Given the rising cases of COVID-19, the university is taking several steps to promote testing, vaccination and face-mask wearing; provide updates for employees who are immunocompromised or who live with someone immunocompromised; and allow for the delay in on-site work for many employees who have been working remotely.

Return-to-Campus Plans

Most departments and units in CNS have been planning for their staff who were working remotely to return to on-site work this month or early next. These departments and units are authorized to delay the planned return of staff in roles that are not student-facing or directly supporting students until September 16. Research staff will get more guidance directly from the vice president for research. The provost communicated specific [guidance and options for faculty and instructors](#) earlier today.

Health and Safety Protocols

The university adopted new [masking guidance](#) that strongly recommends wearing face masks around people indoors, in accordance with current CDC guidelines for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. UT will provide masks at no cost to staff and faculty. Posted signs now encourage masking. Like [vaccines](#) – which are our best tool to combat the spread of COVID-19 – masks are optional but strongly recommended outside of private offices and single-occupant cubicles.

Earlier today, University Health Services notified all students that they will be required to provide proof of [a negative COVID-19 viral test](#) ahead of the first day of classes. [Proactive Community Testing](#) will continue, now up to twice a week, to allow quick and painless saliva or nasal-swab COVID-19 tests for asymptomatic members of the community.

Anyone coming to campus is encouraged to use the [Protect Texas Together App](#) each day. Those with symptoms should stay home and report COVID-19 symptoms to the [Occupational Health Program](#) (OHP) as soon as possible. Employees should contact OHP also if they have been tested because they have symptoms (even if the test was negative). The [Behavior Concerns and COVID-19](#)

Advice Line (BCCAL) remains available as the primary tool to address questions or concerns from the university community about COVID-19.

For the Immunocompromised and their Families

COVID-19 and the Delta variant pose a special risk for the immunocompromised. UT has **an ADA accommodation process for staff** (and a **separate process for faculty**) who submit a request to protect themselves or their household members. The **CDC guidelines** include more about immunocompromised and other medical conditions.

In closing, I want to pass along something our colleague in the Department of Molecular Biosciences, professor Ilya Finkelstein, recently told *The Austin Chronicle*: "Last year at this time, we had no arrows in our quiver, and now we have a series of vaccines readily available for free that are phenomenally effective. Masks also help, but vaccines are the primary weapon of protecting the self and protecting the community." Neither I nor anyone at UT should ask an *individual* student, staff or faculty member their vaccination status or treat a person unequally on that basis (that's prohibited). But as a *community*, **we have opportunities to look to science and show care for one another** through our actions. Thank you for all of your hard work and continued commitment to the education, research, service and community here.

Sincerely,



David Vanden Bout | Interim Dean

This communication is from College of Natural Sciences – Official.

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