

MEMORANDUM

To: All Students, Residents, Staff & Faculty
Fr: David A. Heath, OD, EdM, President *DAH*
Date: 3 January 2023
Re: Spring 2023– COVID-19 Policies & Protocols

The College's COVID's management plan for the spring have been finalized. This communication is intended to provide a summary of updated COVID-19- related policies and protocols for the College community and for health and safety on our 33 West 42nd Street campus.

This is very important information, please read this in its entirety!

Note: *These protocols are subject to change if COVID-19-related conditions warrant.* The College of Optometry's COVID protocols remain consistent with SUNY System guidelines, CDC recommendations and any requirements imposed by the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH).

Current Status:

Health officials are continuing to monitor the increase of cases of COVID/Flu/RSV in the NY Metro area, which is being referred to as the "tridemic". As noted, while community incidence is up in the NY Metro area, we have managed to keep cases quite low within our own community. This has been possible due to our risk mitigation efforts and the evident sense of responsibility shared among our community members. I ask that you continue these efforts to keep our community members safe in the upcoming winter months ahead of us.

I am happy to report our College community continues to be in compliance with CDC COVID-19 vaccine recommendations and the NYSDOH requirements. Currently 10% of our community have reported that they have received the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 bivalent booster. The CDC highly recommends to stay up to date with COVID-19 boosters to help protect yourself from severe illness and hospitalization, especially for those who are high-risk.

Various new emerging subvariants of Omicron, such as BQ.1, BQ.1.1 and XBB appear to be more transmissible and are on the rise in the NY Metro area. Due to this, it is important to stay vigilant. Health officials have mentioned that the majority of the COVID cases related to these new subvariants appear to be relatively mild with regard to symptoms in those who are not considered high risk.

Spring 2023
Summary of COVID-19 Health and Safety Policies

Health & Safety:

- 1. COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate:** The SUNY Student COVID-19 Vaccine Policy remains in effect and requires all students who will have a physical presence on campus to provide evidence of, at minimum, the initial course of COVID vaccination. Individuals are considered fully vaccinated: (1) two weeks after receiving the second dose in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine or (2) two weeks after receiving a single dose of a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine.

The NYS Department of Health's mandate that "covered personnel" of certain health care facilities be vaccinated against COVID-19 remains. *This regulation does not provide an option for testing in lieu of vaccination, and allows only medical exemptions to be considered.* (Religious exemptions are not accepted.) Medical exemption requests can be sent to: MedicalExemptionCommittee@sunyopt.edu

All SUNY members are strongly encouraged to stay up to date on their COVID vaccinations as defined by the CDC, including obtaining any booster authorized by the FDA and recommended by the CDC for their age group. If/when you have received your booster shot(s), please upload an image of your vaccination card. We are required to maintain records of the vaccination status of our community members. **To report:** [Vaccine Status Monitoring \(jotform.com\)](#) or through the SafeInSight app.

- 2. Reporting COVID Positive Test Results:** Any SUNY community member who has tested positive for COVID is required to fill out the [COVID-19 Positive Test Form \(jotform.com\)](#). This is an encrypted and secure link. Once completed, the information will be sent to the COVID Nurse Coordinator directly. A tentative "end of isolation/return to College date" and next steps to complete while isolating at home will be provided. *As per CDC and NYSDOH guidelines, isolation period for fully vaccinated individuals is 5 days from symptom onset or if asymptomatic, from the test collection date.* There is no requirement to test negative to return to work once an individual has met the 5-day isolation period and their symptoms are resolving. Additional safety precautions will be discussed by Nurse Gomez once clearance is provided to return.
- 3. COVID-19 Surveillance Testing:** Mandatory weekly surveillance testing is no longer required for any student, staff or faculty who has a campus-approved medical exemption. **Note:** *The College may implement a regular surveillance testing program of all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, if local COVID-19 conditions warrant for the health and safety of our community. This may include regular testing of employees pursuant to a campus-level labor management agreement.*
- 4. Masks:** *No change to current policy.* As a reminder, ASTM level-2 face masks or better remain as the required standard on campus. **Areas in which all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, are required to wear ASTM level-2 surgical masks or better are:**

- **UEC** - All students, residents, faculty, staff and patients (and other visitors) are required to wear masks at all times when in UEC patient-care areas (floors 5, 6, 7, 8 and the Barbara Saltzman Center for Pediatric Eye Care on the 10th floor)
- **Lobby and Elevators** – Masks must be worn on the lobby level, while riding the elevators and transitioning between elevators on the 5th floor. These are spaces with heavy patient traffic, and everyone will continue to be expected to wear masks in these areas.
- **Clinical Teaching Laboratories** - Masks must also be worn in clinical procedures laboratories as they are in patient care areas.

Please note: If an area (e.g., fitness center, library) is not listed above, it is “mask optional” at the current time.

5. **Cleaning, Disinfecting & Hand Hygiene:** Protocols for cleaning, disinfecting and hand hygiene remain in place. Please be considerate and clean an area you have been using before you leave. The College’s facilities and maintenance team will continue to follow all CDC and State guidance for proper cleaning and sanitation throughout all areas of the College.
6. **All Visitors (including patients)** – Signage is placed indicating that visitors are required to wear acceptable masks to comply with all institutional health and safety standards. Visitors must answer a health screening questionnaire upon entry to the building. Those hosting visitors are expected to communicate expectations in advance and to help ensure compliance.

Academic Program Information- No COVID-19 related restrictions.

Research Program Information- No COVID-19 related restrictions.

University Eye Center (UEC) Information -

1. **CDC Guidelines:** As an Article 28 diagnostic and treatment center, the University Eye Center will continue to adhere to all NYSDOH and CDC guidance for healthcare settings (e.g., cleaning protocols, for patients - symptom and exposure screening, etc.).
2. **Reporting Vaccination Status:** As per NYSDOH, all employees in healthcare settings are required to report their COVID-19 vaccination status. The UEC will continue to enforce this mandate for initial vaccination, as well as for any potential future DOH mandates regarding boosters.
3. **Face Coverings:** All patients, visitors, faculty, residents, staff and students must wear an appropriate face covering at all times while in patient-care areas, as it is still required by NYSDOH.

Event Planning:

All on-campus events must incorporate the appropriate and current health and safety protocols. It is paramount to maintain the health and safety of the SUNY College of Optometry community; therefore, this guidance may be revised at any time should the risk of outbreak increase with new variants or other factors. This policy with additional materials may be found at [COVID-Event-and-Attestation-guidance.pdf \(sunyopt.edu\)](https://www.sunyopt.edu/COVID-Event-and-Attestation-guidance.pdf).

1. Guests and Registration

- Events or gatherings, including social events, should be planned 4-6 weeks in advance. Area vice presidents should be informed during the early planning stages of the anticipated guest count, especially where a substantial number of external guests will be present.
- All guest speakers, lecturers, and attendees must abide by the College's policies and be informed of mask wearing, health screening, and other appropriate protocols in advance of coming to campus. Guests will be required to follow the appropriate protocols and may be asked to leave the event and/or campus if they violate the protocols.
- All attendees should be clearly informed to refrain from attending the event if they are exhibiting symptoms and/or suspect they may have a respiratory illness or virus.
- All events or gatherings must track attendees through a registration and/or check-in process. Documentation of attendees should be retained for at least 30 days following the event.
- A template for online registration including a health and safety attestation is available from IT (Jan Gonzalez).
- All attendees to any event or College-sponsored gathering will be required to complete a registration which includes an attestation. (Current approved attestation is at the end of this policy for reference.) Paper attestations, which should be retained with registration list, must include the clearly printed name of the participant, their signature, and date.

2. Vendors (Catering, Flowers/Décor, A/V, etc.)

- All external event service vendors such as a/v, catering, bartenders, or other non-College personnel who will be on campus for more than a transitory period must wear a mask for the duration of their time on campus and follow all established health and safety protocols.
- All delivery personnel related to an event must wear a mask in designated areas for the duration of their time on campus.
- External vendors and delivery personnel should be escorted by a SUNY College of Optometry employee to the specified area for the event.

3. Food & Beverage

- Lines and gathering around food/beverage service areas should be minimized.
- Buffets and butler-passed items are permitted. Waitstaff and bartenders should be masked if on campus.
- Events should plan to accommodate social distancing for those individuals who may be at high risk for added precaution. This may require reducing the number of guests seated at tables and/or providing additional space during meal time.
- Any College-sponsored event where alcohol may be served on campus is subject to the Alcohol Policy.

Compliance:

Although we hope it is unnecessary, failure to comply with these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action. Failure to comply will be addressed via the appropriate disciplinary process.

As a reminder, incidences of non-compliance may be reported through the SafeInSight app under the iReport tab.

In Conclusion:

- **If you are experiencing new onset of symptoms from *any* respiratory virus such as COVID-19, RSV, or Influenza that cannot be attributed to another health condition, please stay home and get tested!**
- **Beware of complacency!** We must continue our mitigation efforts including the proper use of PPE, hand washing, and modifying our behaviors based on our surroundings.
- **All health and safety policies are subject to change!** Please continue to bear in mind that with the increasing prevalence of new Omicron sub-variants nationwide, it is possible that protocols may change periodically in the spring based on the prevalence of COVID-19 in the broader community.

Stay Safe, Stay Healthy!