

Voluntary COVID-19 testing available for employees week of Nov. 30

Virginia Tech is offering voluntary COVID-19 testing for faculty, staff, and wage employees.

Voluntary testing will be held the week of Nov. 30. Employees must register for testing in advance using the following links:

- Register for Monday, Nov. 30: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/Surveillance1130_122
** Register by 5 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 27.
- Register for Tuesday, Dec. 1: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/Surveillance1130_122
** Register by 5 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 27.
- Register for Wednesday, Dec. 2: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/Surveillance1130_122
** Register by 5 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 27.
- Register for Thursday, Dec. 3: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/arc123_124 ** Register by 5 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 30.
- Register for Friday, Dec. 4: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/arc123_124 ** Register by 5 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 30.

Testing Nov. 30 – Dec. 2 will take place at Lane Stadium and testing Dec. 3 – 4 will take place at Schiffert Health Center (2nd floor). Employees should receive their results in 48 to 72 business hours of being tested.

If you are a high-contact employee who is regularly tested because of your job with the university and you sign up for voluntary testing, note “surveillance” in the comment field when you register.

Additional voluntary employee testing will be offered in December and early January. Dates and registration links will be published soon. See below for other commonly asked questions.

If you have questions about voluntary employee testing, contact employeeesting@vt.edu or call the HR Service Center at 540-231-9331.

During the holidays, employees are reminded to be Hokie Ready! Follow the COVID-19 travel guidelines and tips from Virginia Tech Emergency Management at <https://vtnews.vt.edu/notices/adm-evergreens/vtem-hokiereadytravelcovid.html>. Remember to check the Virginia Tech Ready page at <https://ready.vt.edu> for the latest COVID-19 information from the university.

For FAQ's, visit: <https://vtnews.vt.edu/notices/hr-voluntary-employee-testing122020.html>

Board of Visitors receives briefing on pandemic impact on university workforce

During its two-day meeting held Nov. 15 and 16, the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors received an update on the pandemic's impact on the university workforce.

With the onset of the pandemic, there was a need to quickly shift how employees performed their roles as the university moved to essential operations at the end of March.

“Under essential operations, on-campus services were greatly reduced as well as on-campus presence of employees, but the university was not closed,” said Bryan Garey, vice president for human resources. “We had to quickly and urgently act – in a matter of days, not weeks – to provide employees ways to continue to do their jobs.”

Telework became the solution for the majority of employees while approximately 20 percent remained on-site to staff essential functions. Of the total employee population, approximately 7 percent – around 800 employees – were placed in an on-call status. Under essential operations, these employees were unable to perform their assigned jobs, but remained ready and available to work.

“The university was committed to retaining our talented and dedicated employees. The on-call status provided one option to help us achieve that goal and we continued to pay employees during a time of great uncertainty,” said Garey. “It also provided the university flexibility. We were able to deploy on-call employees to support other areas outside their normal jobs as the need arose.”

In addition to retaining existing employees, the university needed a plan for how to approach hiring and compensation actions as part of a university-wide effort to save costs in anticipation of financial impacts from the pandemic. Using a set of exception criteria, all hiring and compensation requests were reviewed prior to approval, which still allowed critical positions to be filled and critical compensation actions to be taken. The overall result produced significant savings in the first quarter of 2020-21 versus the prior year. New hires were 257 in 2020 compared to 561 during the same timeframe in 2019, which resulted in a significant reduction in personnel costs.

In addition to retention, hiring, and compensation actions, it was important to respond to new

workforce needs that emerged as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

Human Resources, along with many other campus partners including the Division of Campus Planning, Infrastructure, and Facilities; Emergency Management; Environmental Health and Safety; Information Technology; and Procurement, responded to these needs by putting protocols and solutions in place to help employees navigate their new work landscape.

“Workplace safety concerns for on-site employees, increased child and adult care issues, growing anxiety and other concerns within the home, adjusting to a telework environment; all of these needs and others emerged quickly and the university worked to respond quickly,” said Garey.

From enhanced cleaning protocols and procurement of personal protective equipment to communication of new and existing leave options to the development of a virtual learning center and wellness resources to technology and new training for leaders on how to work with employees to balance work and home, the solutions and resources the university made available were broad and multi-faceted.

As the university began to prepare for fall and the return of students, additional challenges arose as the university moved to modified operations.

Approximately 50 percent of the university’s workforce returned to campus along with students, but more than 50 percent of employees continued to work remotely. This shift raised new concerns about workplace safety for the larger on-site employee population and how teams would continue to interact and perform their jobs. Employees had continued concerns about caregiving. Leaders needed guidance on how to balance employee concerns and business needs.

“How to safely handle classrooms and workspaces, cleaning protocols, ensuring employees had the protective equipment they needed, helping employees understand their benefit and leave options, and helping leaders lead in a difficult and all new operating environment were continued issues from spring semester with new twists to address in the fall,” said Garey.

University departments again responded quickly with multiple solutions. Cleaning protocols ramped up, including installing more hand sanitizer stations across campus. Classrooms and common areas were reconfigured and workspace guidelines were implemented to adhere to CDC and state guidelines for physical distancing. Personal protective equipment was provided with ordering processes in place to obtain more.

For leaders and employees, flexibility had been key and became even more important with fall semester. Human Resources provided guidance to colleges and departments on establishing telework agreements and working with employees who needed scheduling flexibility or alternative work options based on their individual needs and concerns.

A resource site for employees and leaders was created where they could find information on fall preparation, benefits and leave, telework guidelines, and more. Zoom sessions were held to equip leaders with the tools and information they needed to help their employees prepare. Consulting sessions were offered by request to colleges and departments. Zoom sessions were provided where employees could get answers to their HR-related questions.

Virginia Tech continues to follow the principles and procedures outlined in its Fall 2020 COVID-19 Operational Plan, to deliver on its commitment to provide best-in-class operations to the university community. Central to the plan is ongoing contract tracing, surveillance, and testing for both on-campus students and high-contact employees.

Testing for high-contact employees was implemented as part of the university’s surveillance testing plan to regularly monitor populations of employees who were most at risk for exposure to the virus. Most recently, voluntary employee testing has been provided as the holidays approach to deliver an additional avenue for employees to get tested at-will.

“Our faculty and staff have shown that we can be flexible and adapt and still deliver a successful semester for our students during a most challenging time. That’s *Ut Prosim* in action,” said Garey.

What’s more is the university and its leaders and employees have learned a lot about how to keep Virginia Tech running in new and innovative ways.

“The pandemic has changed the work environment for good, not just the foreseeable future,” said Garey. “Organizations all over the world have had to figure out new ways to work and Virginia Tech has been among them. The lessons we have learned are giving us new agility and flexibility, which will help us continue to achieve the university’s short-term goals and long-term strategic vision.”

Visit article to access referenced web pages: <https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2020/11/hr-BOVrecap-112020.html>