



From President Tim Sands: The challenge ahead is to stay the course

As we anticipate the beginning of the holiday season, I want to thank you for coming together and rising to meet a challenge unlike anything we have faced for generations. We began the fall semester with a good plan and confidence that our community would take the individual and collective action necessary for success by wearing masks, maintaining distance, and avoiding crowds.

It took discipline, persistence, and a core commitment to the well-being of others, and while we were not perfect, we did what was necessary to ensure the completion of the in-person/hybrid portion of our fall semester.

As of this writing, Schiffert Health Center is reporting a daily average in positive COVID-19 tests of about 12, with an overall positivity rate of about 3 percent. Roughly 10 percent of students living on campus tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 infection at some point in the semester. Random prevalence testing among undergraduate students who live on campus is yielding a positivity of 1.9 percent, while the off-campus positivity is about 1.2 percent. Surveillance testing of employees who serve in higher-contact roles shows a positivity of about 0.1 percent.

Notably, these prevalence figures have been stable since mid-October, about the time COVID-19 began surging once again across the country and in much of Virginia. Our partners at the New River Health District have not seen transmission in Virginia Tech's workplaces or instructional spaces, nor is there significant evidence of transmission from Virginia Tech students to the surrounding communities.

Our challenge today is staying the course. COVID-19 is arguably a greater threat now than at any prior time during the course of this pandemic. As we approach Thanksgiving, take the opportunity to rest, relax, and enjoy time with close friends and family in accordance with public health guidelines. But please remain vigilant and heed the warnings about travel and large indoor groups. With real prospects for vastly better testing, effective treatments, and even vaccines on the horizon, this is not the time to let down our guard.

To the entire Virginia Tech community, stay healthy and continue to protect the health of those more vulnerable than yourself. That's what Hokies do.

With gratitude,
Tim Sands, President

Hosting or attending a gathering

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently shared the following suggestions for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

For those attending a gathering:

- Bring own food, drinks, plates/cups, and utensils.
- Wear a mask, and safely store your mask while eating and drinking.
- Avoid going in/out of the areas where food is prepared or handled, such as in the kitchen.
- Use single-use options, like salad dressing and condiment packets, and disposable items, like food containers, plates, and utensils.

For those hosting a gathering:

- Have a small outdoor meal with family and friends who live in your community.
- Limit the number of guests.
- Have conversations with guests ahead of time to set expectations for celebrating together.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items between use.
- If celebrating indoors, open windows.
- Limit people in food preparation areas.
- Have guests bring their own food and drink.
- If sharing food, have one person serve food and use single-use options, like plastic utensils.

Reminder: Employees should plan now to use annual leave

As a reminder, the last day to use accrued 2020 leave is Jan. 9, 2021.

While 2020 has been an unusual year and employees may not have taken leave that they normally would have taken for a number of reasons, it is important to take time away from work for our mental health and wellness.

In addition, employees are reminded that they will need appropriate leave types to cover Dec. 28 – 31, 2020, during the university's Winter Break. For example, the typical full-time employee who works eight hours Monday through Friday will need 32 hours of leave to use for these days. The most common types of leave used for this period are annual, family personal, compensatory (holiday comp, overtime comp). Sick leave would not be able to be used unless an employee has a substantiated illness or doctor's appointment.

Employees are encouraged to work with managers and supervisors now to plan and ensure they can use leave and reduce their annual leave balances by Jan. 9, 2021. Information about leave carryover limits for different positions can be found on the HR Leave

website at <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/leave.html>.

Employees with questions about leave and leave usage, please contact your college or department's HR representative or the HR Leave Team at hrlleave@vt.edu.

NOTE: Virginia Tech will be closed for the following upcoming holiday breaks:

- Thanksgiving break: University is closed from noon on Wednesday, Nov. 25, through Friday, Nov. 27, and will reopen on Monday, Nov. 30.
- Winter break: University is closed from Thursday, Dec. 24, through Friday, Jan. 1, 2021 and will reopen on Monday, Jan. 4, 2021.

The following days during the breaks are designated holidays for eligible faculty and staff. Employees do not need to use annual leave on these days.

- Thanksgiving break: Wednesday, Nov. 25, starting at noon, through Friday, Nov. 27.
- Winter break: Thursday, Dec. 24, Friday, Dec. 25, and Friday, Jan. 1, 2021.

From Dec. 28 – 31, 2020, employees will need to use appropriate leave types to cover these days.

View Policy No. 4315: Guidelines on Holidays for all Virginia Tech holidays at <https://policies.vt.edu/assets/4315.pdf>. Holidays marked with an asterisk indicate the university is typically closed and are designated holidays for faculty on 12-month appointments.

Support VT charities through the CVC

The Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (CVC) is a charitable giving campaign for all state employees to raise and donate money toward charities in local communities and across the commonwealth.

CVC provides support to approximately 1,000 participating charities that range from health and human services to animal welfare, from environmental conservation to medical research, and everything in between.

Among the CVC charities, three Virginia Tech organizations are participating in this year's campaign: the Virginia Tech Foundation, Virginia Tech Rescue Squad, and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at Virginia Tech. Here's more on how each of these organizations serves the university and surrounding community:

Virginia Tech Foundation: The Virginia Tech Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides private financial support to enable the forward progress of Virginia Tech.

At the request of some faculty and staff, the Virginia Tech Foundation has been added to the list of charities for the CVC campaign.

Giving through the CVC means your gift, which provides unrestricted support for Virginia Tech, can meet critical needs during this unprecedented time. Gifts to the university support institutional priorities, including life-saving research and student scholarships, two areas of key importance as we all live with COVID-19. Gifts to Virginia Tech help us to transform the future, by supporting students, faculty, and educational and research programs that make a difference.

Virginia Tech Rescue Squad: The student-run Virginia Tech Rescue Squad diligently serves the university community 365 days-a-year, providing emergency medical services and emergency response on Blacksburg's campus.

The oldest collegiate rescue squad in the commonwealth, Virginia Tech Rescue Squad members perform the same functions of a municipal rescue squad, responding to around 1,200 annual emergency calls. The squad and its approximately 40 members also provide emergency medical services at major university and athletic events.

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at Virginia Tech: Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at Virginia Tech builds the community through learning, leadership, and service. Founded in 1873, the organization provides volunteer opportunities for students while working with the community on needs.

YMCA runs a Thrift Shop that serves as a great recycling model and produces approximately 10 percent of incoming goods to community groups for families in need. The organization partners with Feeding America Southwest Virginia and the USDA to operate anti-hunger initiatives that included summer pop-up food sites for two communities. This year, the organization expanded their feeding program and reached more children in the New River Valley. Since April, YMCA has distributed 25,000 meals to more than 5,000 children. Their feeding program runs twice a week.

This year's campaign runs from Oct. 1 to Dec. 11. These three Virginia Tech organizations are listed in the Commonwealth of Virginia charity list and employees can donate to them directly through the campaign.

To make a donation, there are many options for employees including payroll deduction through a one-time gift or monthly payments, cash or check, credit card payment through cvcgives.org (using the agency code 208 – Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), or using a monetary direct give payment through the direct give form to receive credit for donating to a CVC-approved charity and Virginia Tech's direct giving.

Questions should be directed to department CVC representatives. For more information, visit www.cvc.hr.vt.edu.