



Employee COVID-19 vaccination deadline is Friday, Oct. 1; mask requirements remain in effect

In the university's continuing effort to ensure the health and safety of our campus communities, both students and employees of Virginia Tech are required to get the COVID-19 vaccination or receive a vaccine exemption because of a medical condition or sincerely held religious belief.

Virginia Tech employees, including full- and part-time faculty, staff, and wage in all Virginia Tech locations, have until Oct. 1 to receive and report their COVID-19 vaccination (<https://policies.vt.edu/assets/ppm%20317.pdf>) or file for a vaccination exemption (<https://oea.vt.edu/ada-accessibility-services/resources/covid-vaccine-exemptions.html>) with Virginia Tech's Office for Equity and Accessibility.

Thank you to the nearly 90 percent of employees who have reported their vaccination information to the university. Employees who have a vaccination exemption are required to participate in weekly surveillance testing. Additionally, until an employee provides a record of their vaccination information and are fully vaccinated (two weeks following final dose), they will be required to participate in weekly testing. No exemptions will be granted from testing. Information about the testing program and frequently asked questions are available on the Virginia Tech Ready site at <https://ready.vt.edu>.

Failure to receive the vaccination and report vaccination information or file for an exemption by the Oct. 1 deadline will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. For detailed instructions on how to register vaccination information, visit <https://ready.vt.edu/vaccinations.html#instructions>.

As announced on Sept. 14 (<https://vtx.vt.edu/notices/2021/09/unirel-mask-requirement-september.html>), mask requirements for indoor spaces remain in effect. After a thorough review of public health data including high transmission rates in the New River Valley and across Virginia, and consistent with the advice provided by local and state public health officials, Virginia Tech has extended its proper mask use requirement (<https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/08/unirel-mask-requirements.html>) by all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, when indoors in designated public areas until further notice. Unvaccinated individuals are required to wear a mask at all times when in university owned or leased facilities.

Questions on vaccination requirement, how to file for an exemption, testing, or the university's mask requirement, contact your college or department's HR representative.

Why are masks still required indoors at Virginia Tech?

The majority of students, faculty, and staff at Virginia Tech are fully vaccinated for COVID-19. So, why are masks still required in indoor spaces at the university?

University leaders will continue to monitor the data and introduce changes when it is safe to do so. But until COVID-19 transmission rates remain consistently low, Virginia Tech will continue to require individuals to wear masks in public, indoor spaces, regardless of vaccination status.

"We're trending in the right direction, but we want to see those trends continue before we change any mitigation strategies," said Mike Mulhare, assistant vice president for emergency management at Virginia Tech. "We don't want to take a step backwards."

As the contagious delta variant spreads locally and across the country, and some breakthrough infections are possible, wearing a mask, along with other mitigation strategies, is an important step to help reduce the rate of infection.

Virginia Tech is monitoring transmission rates for COVID-19 on the Blacksburg campus, and this week, these rates declined to a moderate level from a substantial level previously, Mulhare said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines a moderate transmission rate as 10 to 49 positive cases per 100,000 people. The transmission rate, based on last week's testing data (the past seven days), declined from approximately 73 to 27 cases per 100,000 people.

For Southwest Virginia, the COVID-19 transmission rate was in the high level, with 424 cases per 100,000 people, for the week ended Sept. 25, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

Masks act as a barrier to germs that spread through the respiratory route, according to Noelle Bissell, health director for the New River Health District. Wearing a mask indoors, along with avoiding crowded and poorly ventilated places, are multi-layered approaches to controlling the spread of COVID-19, she said.

"Let's do the things that work," said Bissell during a meeting with the news media on Sept. 27.

As for total COVID-19 cases in the New River Valley, “universities are not contributing significantly to our case numbers,” Bissell said.

Virginia Tech continues to monitor and report positive COVID-19 cases, as well as its vaccinated population, via two online dashboards at <https://ready.vt.edu/>.

Overall, the university’s high coronavirus vaccination rates and the campus community’s willingness to adhere to public health guidelines are the reasons that Virginia Tech can operate as it has this semester, Mulhare said.

“We’re seeing the benefit of what we’ve done,” he said. “We’re just not to a point where we can change the course we are currently on. Virginia Tech is constantly reevaluating the data and will adjust mitigation strategies when possible.”

The university continues to test unvaccinated students and employees regularly for COVID-19.

Oct. 1 is the deadline for employees to either receive a vaccine and report that information or file for a vaccine exemption -- <https://ready.vt.edu/vaccinations.html#instructions>.

Aside from the coronavirus, health officials expect cases of the flu to be higher this year than last year. That’s based on the flu season in the southern hemisphere, which tracks similarly to the United States, Bissell said. The health department is offering flu shots and COVID-19 vaccines, and individuals can receive both at the same time.

Virginia Tech is hosting several flu shot clinics for students and employees. The first will be held on Oct. 6 at Rec Sports fieldhouse.

Read more about other flu shot clinics planned at <https://vt.edu/flu.html>.

Flu season is coming; protect yourself and others with a flu vaccine

Thank you to all of the members of our community who have received their COVID-19 vaccine. Your commitment to your health as well as the health of your family and others in the community is a critical part of the fight against COVID-19.

While fighting the pandemic continues to be an important focus, fall is the time when other respiratory illnesses, like flu, begin to spread. It’s important that we all take the necessary steps to reduce the spread of these seasonal illnesses too. That’s why Virginia Tech is encouraging all employees and students to get a flu vaccination.

As a service to all employees, Hokie Wellness offers flu vaccination clinics each fall. The clinics are for employees only to limit the number of visitors on campus. Families/dependents of employees may be vaccinated at the drive through clinic on Oct. 30; see below for more information.

- Salaried faculty and staff who are covered by state

health insurance plans must show their insurance card to receive a free vaccine.

- Non-student wage employees may also receive a free flu vaccine at the clinics by showing their Hokie Passport.
- Salaried F&S who are not covered by state health insurance plans may receive a flu vaccine at the clinics; be prepared to pay \$25 by cash or check at the clinic.

Flu vaccination clinics begin Oct. 5 and run through Oct. 30 at locations across campus. Registration is required for the flu clinics. Please be aware of the following:

- Because the flu clinics will be held in indoor public spaces, masks will be required to be worn and attendees will be asked to maintain physical distancing.
- Individuals who feel sick, are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should not attend the event.
- Injectable flu vaccines will be available at these clinics.

Following is information on the clinics:

- North End Center: Oct. 5, 12, 26, & 28, 8 a.m. – 2:30 pm.
- Steger Hall: Oct. 6, 13, and 27, 8 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
- North End Center – drive through clinic: Oct. 30, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.; Families/dependents of employees may attend this clinic.

NOTE: The registration link found at <https://vtx.vt.edu/notices/2021/09/hokie-wellness-flu-clinics-2021.html> contains specific information about each clinic.

If you are unable to make it to a Hokie Wellness clinic, vaccinations are also available at most local pharmacies and through health care providers.

State health plan members may get a free flu vaccine at pharmacies participating in their health plan’s network.

- COVA Care, COVA HDHP, and COVA HealthAware members may receive flu shots at no cost from network physicians’ offices and other participating providers.
- Kaiser Permanente HMO members must go to a participating Kaiser medical center.

Contact your health plan provider if you have questions about your benefits or for information on receiving flu vaccines from non-network providers or pharmacies. If you plan to get your flu vaccine at a pharmacy, be sure to call ahead to confirm the pharmacy is participating in the program and that shots are available. An appointment may be required.

Vaccination is the best protection against contracting the flu. For more information about the flu from Virginia Tech, visit our flu information page at <https://vt.edu/flu.html>.

For questions:

- About Hokie Wellness flu clinics, contact Hokie Wellness at hokiewellness@vt.edu or 540-231-8878.
- About flu vaccines and your medical plan, contact your plan provider.
- From students about the flu, contact Schiffert Health Center at health@vt.edu or 540-231-6444.

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