

Planning underway for strategies to protect public health in the fall semester

Virginia Tech President Tim Sands and members of university leadership are reviewing operational strategies to protect public health on campus, with a goal of resuming in-person instruction and experiential learning opportunities for the fall semester. The recommendations were developed by the university's COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) for the university to consider as it prepares for an expected June 8 announcement on fall semester plans. Read more: https://vt.edu/content/dam/vtnews_vt_edu/documents/IMT-public-health-approach.pdf

"The COVID-19 Incident Management Team's recommendations are a roadmap to resuming campus activity with the health and safety of our community as the top priority," Sands said. "Virginia Tech's proactive management and coordination with the commonwealth's statewide efforts have flattened the curve and given us the confidence to plan a transition back to teaching and research this fall. I'm proud of the way our community stepped up to protect the most vulnerable among us."

Consistent with the Governor's Executive Order 61 on the easing of restrictions, and in accordance with university policy with public health guidelines in place, the university is beginning to re-engage its workforce based on the needs of campus. Specific timelines and additional details will follow and all information will be posted online at <https://vt.edu/covid-19> and shared through the VT News daily email.

"As we move our workforce back to campus, we will remain engaged with the Town of Blacksburg and the New River Valley COVID-19 Task Force to ensure a comprehensive and successful transition," Sands said. "Given our statewide presence and the varied impact the virus has across the commonwealth, we are working in parallel to address our footprints in Roanoke, Northern Virginia, and across Virginia."

The president's goal is a robust teaching and research agenda that protects the most vulnerable and applies our new understanding of public health needs to an open campus. To implement in-person instruction and experiential learning opportunities for both undergraduate and graduate students while also preventing a resurgence of COVID-19 illness, the university will likely deploy a multimodal approach involving delivery of in-person, hybrid,

and online learning. Final decisions will depend on data still being collected and the decisions and actions of the governor and the Virginia Department of Health. Reports and recommendations are expected to be completed in early June.

The university's COVID-19 Incident Management Team will continue to prepare for several scenarios, but consistent with the president's intention to transition to an on-campus experience for students this fall, they will focus their efforts on re-engaging the workforce over the summer and scaling to meet the needs of the emerging fall semester plan.

Faculty, staff, and student leaders will work closely with leadership, the IMT, the community task force, and other teams to inform the path forward. Individual planning between employees and their supervisors will determine how, when, and what work will resume on campus, and what activities can continue through teleworking. Guidance and requirements will be shared through the expanded website and within each area.

Leave available to employees impacted by COVID-19

Several federal and state leave options are available to employees who have been impacted by COVID-19.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA):

This Act of Congress is in response to the economic impacts of the ongoing 2019-20 coronavirus pandemic. The legislation has two components that provide the following leave benefits:

- Federal Emergency Sick Leave (FESL/FMES)
- Expanded Federal Family and Medical Leave (FFML)

FFCRA leave provisions are effective April 1, 2020 and end Dec. 31, 2020. Visit <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/leave/covid19-ffcra-leave.html> for detailed FFCRA information including eligibility, reasons for use, leave amounts, and more. A summary of FFCRA is also available.

Public Health and Emergency Leave (PHEL):

This leave benefit was activated by the Commonwealth of Virginia for state employees as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and when remote work options are not available. This benefit is available to Virginia Tech full- and part-time faculty and staff, and many wage employees who are impacted by the virus.

Visit <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/leave/public-health-emergency-leave.html> for detailed PHEL information including eligibility, reasons for use, leave amounts, and more.

If employees have questions about FFCRA or PHEL, please contact your department leave representative, your college or business unit HR partner, or the HR Leave Team at hrleave@vt.edu. For information on other types of leave available to Virginia Tech employees, visit the leave page at <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/leave.html>.

Staying safe at home during COVID-19

While moving classes online and working remotely may help to reduce the spread of COVID-19, it is not always the safest option for survivors of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. When survivors are forced to spend more time in the home or in close proximity to their abuser, an abuser can use any tool to exert control over their victim, including a global health crisis such as COVID-19.

Many employees are working from home and students are taking classes remotely now that Virginia Tech has moved to online classes and essential operations. Social distancing and staying at home are circumstances that an abuser may take advantage of to isolate and gain more control. School or work may have been the safe space and outlet for a survivor. Now no longer an option, this can be a particularly lonely, scary and potentially dangerous time.

Reach out to the resources below for support and for help to create a plan if you are:

- Isolated and/or not feeling safe – emotionally, physically, or sexually – in your home.
- Worried about a friend or family member who is not safe in their home.
- A university employee and are worried about a colleague or a student who is not safe at home.

You can get help developing a safety plan from the Women's Center at Virginia Tech or the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley. A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to be safe while in a relationship, planning to leave, or after you leave. Having a safety plan can help you to protect yourself during this stressful and potentially dangerous time. You can develop an online safety plan here.

Be kind to yourself

COVID-19 is causing uncertainty for many people, but getting through this time while experiencing abuse can feel overwhelming. Taking time for your health and wellness can make a difference in how you feel. To learn more about how to build in self-care while staying safe please take advantage of Hokie Wellness's new Wellness at Home site.

Health assessment deadline extended for Premium Rewards until May 29

In an effort to advance employee wellness and maximize employee savings, COVA Care and COVA HealthAware members will have until May 29 to complete a health assessment in order to receive a Premium Reward beginning July 1. View step-by-step tutorials to complete health assessments for COVA Care (https://video.vt.edu/media/COVA+Care+Premium+Rewards+Tutorial/1_hc1k15dw) and COVA HealthAware (https://video.vt.edu/media/COVA+HealthAware+Premium+Rewards+Tutorial/1_x85efp0z).

Participants must complete a health assessment with their current plan administrator. This includes employees who requested a plan change during Open Enrollment (<https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/health/open-enrollment.html>) from one eligible premium reward plan to the other.

Employees and their enrolled spouse must register with a separate account to submit a health assessment.

There is no extension to Open Enrollment actions. All elections, including plan changes and enrollment in Flexible Spending Accounts, were due May 15, 2020.

Employees can complete a health assessment at any time during the year for a Premium Reward that will be effective approximately six to eight weeks after submitted.

For questions, contact the HR service center at hrservicecenter@vt.edu or 540-231-9331.