

**From President Tim Sands: COVID-19 vaccines required for all employees**

With the start of the fall semester and our continued commitment to offer an in-person semester and full Hokie experience, I could not be prouder of the remarkable progress we have made. As of today, 94 percent of our students and 82 percent of our employees are fully vaccinated. This is an extraordinary accomplishment, and as we continue to analyze the emerging science and data from this ongoing global pandemic, we remain deeply committed to the health and safety of the Virginia Tech community and those around us, while preserving opportunities for in-person teaching, learning, research, and engagement.

In recent weeks, the delta variant of COVID-19 has become the dominant form of the disease and is about twice as infectious as the original virus. Many parts of the country are experiencing COVID-19 surges; cases and hospitalizations in the New River Health District are at levels not seen since April.

Given this landscape has changed in recent weeks, **vaccinations will now be required for all university employees, with exemptions for medical reasons and sincerely held religious beliefs.** As I noted in my June 8 message announcing the student vaccination requirement, we weathered significant surges in COVID-19 cases in Blacksburg last year through robust testing, self-quarantine, masking, and physical distancing. This year, data have shown that vaccination remains our best tool. In Virginia, 98 percent of cases, 97 percent of hospitalizations, and 98 percent of deaths are among those who have not been fully vaccinated. It is essential that every person in the Virginia Tech community who can be vaccinated, is vaccinated, ensuring that those who cannot be vaccinated are able to participate in campus life and in-person teaching, learning, research, and engagement.

COVID-19 has a proven ability to mutate and very likely will be with us in varying degrees for the foreseeable future. We will adapt and manage in a way that protects the health of our community and allows for the fullest Hokie experience.

Public health guidance has also evolved, leading to new vaccine requirements and other actions across the public and private sectors. At Virginia Tech, we recently announced a requirement for face coverings in public indoor spaces and a surveillance testing program. By expanding our vaccine requirement to all employees, we can stay ahead of this virus and generate as much population immunity as possible.

With the issuance of Presidential Policy Memorandum 317, employees should visit the Ready site for more information about vaccination requirements, confirming vaccination status, and requesting an exemption. The deadline for employees to report that they have received the full course of vaccine doses (one or two, depending on the vaccine) or to seek an exemption is **Oct. 1, 2021**. Action will be taken for those who do not follow the requirements. If you have questions, please contact your HR representative.

If you are among the 82 percent of the faculty and staff who are fully vaccinated and have already submitted your vaccination information, no further action is needed. Please continue to follow the guidelines posted on ready.vt.edu, and thank you for helping safeguard the health of our community.

As we said in the very early stages of this pandemic, decisions such as an employee vaccine requirement are not made lightly. Those decisions are based on the data, in consultation with our public health professionals. As with the student vaccine requirement, we know there will be thoughtful questions and concerns. We are committed to working with all our employees to take this important step in protecting their health, as well as that of our colleagues, students, and entire community.

I continue to greatly appreciate the selfless commitment that will help us manage through and emerge stronger from this pandemic. And thank you in advance for taking this additional step toward ensuring a fully in-person fall semester, with all the benefits of the shared experience we cherish at Virginia Tech. I am confident that this “next normal” will make us a better university and an even more resilient, connected, and service-minded community. Read message: <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/08/president-vaccine-statement.html>

From President Tim Sands: Welcome to the start of an important year in Virginia Tech’s history

I don’t think I have ever welcomed fall with more enthusiasm, and from what I’m seeing around campus, you feel the same. Earlier this summer, we had reason to believe that the pandemic would subside by now, but despite the resurgence driven by the delta variant, we are now much better prepared for a full in-person experience than we were a year ago. The difference is the availability of safe and effective vaccines. I’d like to thank all of our students, employees, and community members who are now fully vaccinated. Currently, 94 percent

of our students and 82 percent of our employees – more than 90 percent of our entire population - have reported receiving their final dose. With our recent decision to require vaccinations for employees as well as students, our vaccination rate will be well beyond almost any community of our size in the country, and that will allow us to participate in the in-person experiences that Hokies value.

That's not to say that we are in a bubble. Our campuses are open, and we continue to engage in the communities we serve. Our modeling indicates that we must remain vigilant, especially at the start of the semester when our experience shows that infections are likely to spike. We owe it to those in our larger community who are immunocompromised or who cannot yet be vaccinated to wear face coverings in indoor public spaces and in instructional settings until we see infection rates on our campuses and in the surrounding communities drop to moderate levels. We also have a personal responsibility to avoid poorly ventilated spaces with people we do not know, and if we must pass through those spaces, to wear a face covering.

In addition, I'm thankful for the dedicated Virginia Tech employees who worked over the summer to prepare our campuses for an in-person experience. Let's show our appreciation by following the guidelines and supporting the in-person experience they worked so hard to facilitate.

If you have not been on our Blacksburg campus this summer, you may be surprised by the number of construction projects underway.

We are also pleased to welcome another academically strong entering class, diverse in every dimension, and committed to our motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve). And we are looking forward to providing a proper belated welcome to everyone who joined Virginia Tech during the pandemic, including last fall's entering cohort.

This fall we kick off our celebration of Virginia Tech's sesquicentennial, 150 years since our doors opened as Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1872. While we will be reflecting on our past and celebrating the present, we will be focused on our Beyond Boundaries future. Virginia Tech's roots are mature, but we are also a young institution, becoming a comprehensive public research university only in 1970. As a result, we have a wonderful balance of tradition and vibrancy.

We are an institution that embraces change, works easily across boundaries, and readily engages the communities we serve. In the coming years, we have an opportunity to become a leading global land-grant research university with a commitment to transformational research, authentic engagement with partners across all sectors, and a model for inclusive and experiential education. I invite all Hokies – students, faculty, staff, alumni, partners, and friends – to participate in this celebration and conversation through the end of 2022.

Have a wonderful fall semester. Be committed. Be well. Go

Hokies! Read message: <https://vtx.vt.edu/articles/2021/08/president-welcome-message-august2021.html>

Virginia Overtime Wage Act update

The Virginia Overtime Wage Act (VOWA), that was effective July 1, 2021, (requiring compensation for overtime hours and eliminating the accrual of compensatory leave), was amended as of Aug. 9, 2021. See the previous message published June 17, 2021 - <https://vtx.vt.edu/notices/2021/06/hr-overtime-wage-act.html>. Effective Aug. 10, 2021, the amendment reinstates the option to allow compensating hours worked in excess of 40 by non-exempt employees at a time and a half of the regular hourly rate OR to allow leave accrual at the time and a half rate.

This change does not affect overtime earned and paid between July 1, 2021 and Aug. 9, 2021.

The Leave and Time Worked Reporting System will be updated to reflect these changes. The process for compensating overtime will revert back the way it was prior to July 1, 2021, resulting in the accrual of compensatory leave at the time and a half rate for hours worked in excess of 40. No action is required by departments or employees for the overtime leave accrual as long as hours worked are recorded in the Leave and Time Worked Reporting System. This change should not impact hourly wage employees using the TimeClock Plus System to record hours worked.

Additional details related to this change will be provided in a notice to departments and disseminated to employees in an upcoming leave notice. In the meantime, questions should be directed to college/department HR representatives or the HR Leave Team at hrleave@vt.edu.

University offices to close at 2 p.m. for Sept. 3 football game

The university has approved the closing of administrative and non-instructional university offices on the Blacksburg campus at 2 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 3. The closing will reduce on-campus faculty and staff presence to help relieve traffic congestion and facilitate other operational procedures for the football game that night against the University of North Carolina. The kickoff for the game will be at 6 p.m.

Classes will not be cancelled and other critical operations will remain open. Faculty and staff directly supporting classroom instruction and other critical university operations should work their normal schedule. Employees supporting classroom instruction or other critical university operations during the authorized closing will receive compensatory time based on the start and end time of their work schedule. Faculty and staff who telework on authorized telework arrangements on this day are expected to continue working their normal schedule and will not receive compensatory leave. Read message: <https://vtx.vt.edu/notices/2021/08/ops-provost-authorized-closing-sept321.html>