

From President Tim Sands: Mask requirements may be lifted in the coming weeks

Dear Hokie community,

As Virginia Tech persevered through the past two years of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone in our community has looked forward to an eventual return to normalcy. As confidence grows that the omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has nearly passed, it appears that we will soon have the opportunity to eliminate the complications of required masks and distancing from our daily routines. Although the emergence of future variants of concern cannot be ruled out, this is welcome news.

Since last summer, Virginia Tech has required masks for everyone in indoor public spaces, including classrooms, labs, theatres, and sports venues. Working with vaccinations and boosters, these mask requirements have kept COVID-19 cases manageable on our campuses. As COVID-19 recedes, we continue to follow the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and track the following data to inform our decision on lifting mask requirements:

- New hospitalizations for COVID-19 in Virginia and in the region
- Numbers of employees and students in isolation while recovering from COVID-19
- Employees unavailable for work and students unavailable for learning due to the impact of COVID-19 on families
- Weekly numbers of reported positive tests per 100,000 people on campus and in our communities
- Percentage of faculty, staff, and students who are fully vaccinated

All of these indicators are currently trending in the right direction, though on a later timeline than communities where the omicron variant first surged. Once we are confident that these trends will be sustained in our local communities, mask requirements will be lifted. Based on current data, we expect to reach this threshold in the next several weeks. When we determine that the time has come to make a change, we will post an announcement on the Ready site that will take effect immediately and will be followed by email and social media messages. Until such a time, it is important that we all continue to comply with the current mask requirement. Please understand there may still be a need to recommend continued protections in certain

situations outside of our campus and while using public transit.

Your patient and faithful adherence to our public health measures have protected our community, kept our university operational, and supported our mission throughout the past two years. Thank you for doing your part to help us reach this important milestone. Please continue to take care of yourself and support others who are in need by using the resources available and shared below.

Tim Sands,
President

- Better Together - <https://well-being.vt.edu/mental-health.html>
- Cook Counseling Center at 540-231-6557.
- Dean of Students Office at 540-231-3787. Referral to a campus cleric may be made through this office.
- Employee Assistance Program
 - Anthem at 855-223-9277
 - Aetna at 888-238-6232
 - Kaiser Permanente at 866-517-7042
 - Optima Health Vantage HMO at 866-846-2682
- Hokie Wellness at 540-231-2233 (students) or 540-231-8878 (employees)
- Office of Housing and Residence Life at 540-231-6205
- Equity and Accessibility at 540-231-2010
- University Ombuds Office at 540-231-3125
- Graduate Office of the Ombudsperson at 540-231-9573

Virginia Tech continues pay supplement for eligible full-time staff employees

In March 2019 (<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2019/03/staff-pay-increase-article032019.html>), Virginia Tech announced the implementation of a \$500 pay supplement (<https://www.hr.vt.edu/compensation-performance-management/compensation/staff-pay-increase.html>) to be issued to eligible university and classified staff employees with an annual salary of \$35,500 or less.

Based on input from the university's Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and other campus groups, and with continued executive support, the supplement will be issued again for 2022 on Feb. 16 to almost 600 staff members making \$35,500 or less.

The Virginia Tech 2022 pay supplement is intended to help defray employment costs such as parking or child care, and is part of the university's ongoing efforts create a culture of excellence throughout the organization.

This taxable supplement, which was announced in conjunction with a pay increase that took effect in July 2019, was first paid out in January 2020.

Health Plan Reimbursement for COVID-19 at-home tests

The federal government has announced health plan reimbursement for eligible at-home COVID-19 tests purchased January 15, 2022 or later. This mandate is in effect until the end of the federal Coronavirus Public Health Emergency.

Based on the guidelines provided by the federal government, each individual covered on your health plan can receive up to eight (8) at-home COVID-19 tests each month. If you purchase a test kit that includes two rapid tests, those will count as two of your eight (8) covered tests.

At-home diagnostic tests can be purchased over the counter, online, at a local pharmacy, or from a big-box store. Reimbursement guidelines are available at your individual health plan websites. See the links below for more information:

- COVA Care and COVA HDHP flyer: <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/benefitsdocuments/covid-19/cova-care-and-cova-hdhp-flyer-and-claims-information-012522.pdf>
- COVA HealthAware flyer: <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/benefitsdocuments/covid-19/aetna-flyer-and-covid-19-at-home-test-claims-form-2022.pdf>
- Kaiser Permanente HMO flyer: <https://www.dhrm.virginia.gov/docs/default-source/benefitsdocuments/covid-19/kaiser-permanente-covid-19-at-home-tests-2022.pdf>
- Optima Health Vantage HMO information: <https://www.optimahealth.com/covid-19/coverage-of-at-home-over-the-counter-covid19-test-kits>

In addition, visit [COVIDtests.gov](https://www.covidtests.gov) for information on free tests that may be available through government services. You can still use in-person diagnostic COVID-19 testing sites through your doctor's office, a pharmacy or health clinic, or an urgent care center. Visit this COVID-19 test site finder at <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/about-covid-19/testing/find-covid-19-tests/find-covid-19-testing-site> to find a testing location close to you.

For additional questions, contact your health plan provider at <https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/health-insurance/health-plans.html>.

COVID-19 leave options

Public Health Emergency Leave (PHEL) (<https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/leave/public-health-emergency-leave.html>) is available to employees for many COVID-19 related leave incidents including:

- To attend to an employee's own illness due to a confirmed positive test for COVID-19. The employee's return to the workplace must comport with the CDC's recommendations.
- To attend to an immediate family member who has contracted COVID-19 through a confirmed positive test.
- To quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 if unable to continue your job duties remotely.
- Up to 8 hours of PHEL may be used to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine/booster and/or recover from side effects resulting from obtaining the vaccine.

For 2022, PHEL was reset effective Jan. 10. Employees can receive up to 40 hours (prorated based on FTE), depending on their job classification, to use during the 2022 leave year, which runs from Jan. 10, 2022 to Jan. 9, 2023. Any PHEL balances remaining from the 2021 leave year will not be added to the 2022 balance.

Once the allotment of PHEL is used, employees may use appropriate and available leave balances (Traditional or VSDP Sick Leave, Family-Personal Leave, Annual Leave, Compensatory Leave, Overtime Leave, Recognition Leave) or Leave without Pay for COVID-related leave needs.

Please note PHEL could be subject to expiration as the year progresses. Any additional information will be communicated as it becomes available. For questions regarding leave, please contact the Human Resources Leave Team at hrleave@vt.edu.