

**Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education and Local Health Districts
Considerations for Students and Staff who are Returning Home for Holidays or Extended Breaks
Updated November 15, 2021**

Note: The revision history is located at the end of this document.

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Background

This guidance provides local health districts and administrators of institutions of higher education (IHEs) (e.g., colleges, universities) with considerations for how IHE students and staff can return home safely for holidays or extended breaks. Guidance has been updated to reflect the different recommendations depending on whether a student or staff member is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Learn more about who is considered fully vaccinated [here](#).

People who are not fully vaccinated include individuals of all ages who have not completed a vaccination series to protect against COVID-19.

Guidance specific for the traveling IHE population is necessary because:

- Some students may not have received the COVID-19 vaccine or may have only received one dose of a two-dose series before leaving campus to return home.
- Students and staff of IHEs may be at risk of exposure to COVID-19 in a number of ways and therefore may pose a greater risk of spreading it to family members and others at home.
 - Some IHEs might be experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak or have higher levels of spread of COVID-19 than areas where students' families live.
 - To get home, students and staff might be exposed during short- or long-distance travel.
 - While home, students and staff may want to socialize with friends from other areas or IHEs and other family members during holiday gatherings.
- Although IHE students are typically younger adults who are generally considered to have lower risk of developing severe COVID-19, people of any age with [certain medical conditions](#) are more likely to develop severe COVID-19 including students/staff members and their family members.

COVID-19 Prevention Measures that are Recommended at All Times

- Everyone who is eligible should get vaccinated against COVID-19. If possible, students and staff should be fully vaccinated before returning home. They should wait two weeks after receiving their final dose to travel—it takes time for the body to build protection after any vaccination. An

additional dose of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer and Moderna) is recommended as part of the initial vaccination series for people with moderately or severely weakened immune systems. A booster dose of the Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson vaccine is recommended for certain people who are fully vaccinated. More information is available at the [VDH COVID-19 Vaccine website](#).

- Although getting vaccinated is one of the best tools to prevent COVID-19, everyone should consider their risk in participating in daily activities, especially if they are not fully vaccinated. More information about safer activities based on vaccination status is available [here](#).
- Gatherings and crowded places pose a risk for those who are not fully vaccinated. They should put 6 feet of distance between themselves and people who do not live in their household.
- Wearing masks is required or recommended in certain situations, even if an individual is fully vaccinated. Learn more about current VDH mask guidance by visiting [VDH's mask webpage](#).
- Everyone should [wash their hands](#) frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol can be used.
- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned often. Disinfect your home when someone is sick or if someone who is positive for COVID-19 has been in your home within the last 24 hours.
- People who have been exposed to COVID-19 need to stay home (quarantine) [until it is safe to be around others](#). There are [some exceptions](#) (i.e., for fully vaccinated or recently recovered people). Even fully vaccinated people should get tested if they are [exposed to COVID-19](#).
- People who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, need to stay home (isolate) [until it is safe to be around others](#).
- Fully vaccinated people should continue to take certain steps to protect themselves and others. More information is available [here](#).
- Anyone who is not fully vaccinated should continue to [wear a mask](#), [watch their distance](#), avoid crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and [wash their hands](#) often.

Minimizing Exposure Risks before Leaving Campus

Minimizing risk of exposure and following general public health considerations during the two weeks before leaving campus for an extended time is a logical step for everyone. This means avoiding large crowds and poorly ventilated places, staying away from persons with symptoms of COVID-19, [washing hands](#), cleaning high-touch areas often, and adhering to respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette.

- Fully vaccinated students and staff should follow Virginia [prevention](#) requirements and recommendations for [masking](#), [distancing](#), and other precautions. They should also follow additional local and IHE requirements and recommendations that may apply.
- Students and staff who are not fully vaccinated should follow all recommendations (e.g., [wearing a mask](#), [physical distancing](#), [avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces](#), [handwashing](#)). They should also minimize their interactions with others as much as possible in the 14 days before leaving the IHE. Those who are unable to limit interactions with others at the IHE may consider quarantining themselves for 14 days after they arrive home.

Anyone with [certain medical conditions](#) that weaken their immune system should continue to take all precautions until their healthcare provider says they no longer need to do so.

How to Travel Safely

Students and staff travel home by multiple means, including personal vehicle or commercial/public transportation by airplane, bus, or rideshare. Fully vaccinated individuals can travel safely in the United States. Though all fully vaccinated people are less likely to get and spread COVID-19, international

travelers may still face additional risks and should follow the recommendation provided [below](#). All travelers should be aware of potential risks of exposure to COVID-19 while traveling and take steps to minimize the risk of exposure during travel home. Traveling alone in a private vehicle is the safest option, particularly for travelers who are not fully vaccinated.

- Travelers should follow all masking and distancing requirements and recommendations in effect for their mode and location of travel.
- Students/staff should **not** use commercial/public transportation if they are in isolation or quarantine because they are potentially exposing others to COVID-19.
- Exposures can happen during travel and would negate a pre-travel negative test for COVID-19.
- To minimize the risk of exposure, students/staff who are not fully vaccinated should always (during travel, while at home, before getting tested, while waiting for test results, after getting test results) follow the core prevention steps (e.g., [wearing a mask](#), [physical distancing](#), [avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces](#), [handwashing](#), [getting vaccinated](#)). All travelers, including fully vaccinated travelers, should follow the local recommendations and requirements along their travel route and at their destination. The [VDH Travelers website](#) is the best resource for up-to-date information about travel in Virginia, including recommendations and travel-related requirements.

COVID-19 Testing Recommendations

VDH continues to recommend [COVID-19 testing](#) for any individual with [signs/symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 as a [close contact](#), regardless of vaccination status. Visit [VDH's COVID-19 Testing website](#) to learn more details about testing recommendations and [VDH's COVID-19 Testing Sites](#) to find testing sites in Virginia.

Travel Recommendations and Requirements, including for COVID-19 Testing, Before and After Travel:

Domestic Travel Recommendations and Requirements	Not Vaccinated	Fully Vaccinated
Get tested 1-3 days before travel	✓	
Get tested 3-5 days after travel and self-quarantine for 7 days. Self-quarantine for 10 days if you don't get tested.	✓	
Self-monitor for symptoms	✓	✓
Wear a mask and take other precautions during travel	✓	✓

International Travel Recommendations and Requirements	Not Vaccinated	Fully Vaccinated
Get tested 1-3 days before traveling out of the U.S.	✓	
Mandatory test required before flying to the U.S. from a foreign country	✓	✓

	No more than 1 day before travel	No more than 3 days before travel
Get tested 3-5 days after travel	✓	✓
Self-quarantine after travel for 7 days with a negative test or 10 days without test	✓	
Self-monitor for symptoms	✓	✓
Wear a mask and take other precautions during travel	✓	✓
<p>Noncitizen, nonimmigrant air travelers to the United States who are aged 18 years or older are required to show proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before flying to the United States from a foreign country. There are some limited exceptions available here.</p>		

There are certain caveats to consider regarding testing:

- View the [VDH Travelers website](#) for the most up-to-date information about travel in Virginia, including recommendations and travel-related requirements.
- RT-PCR is the preferred test to diagnose COVID-19 infections, but antigen tests may also be considered. For more information on antigen testing, see [here](#).
- False positive or false negative test results are possible with any test, particularly if the person being tested has a low likelihood of having COVID-19 (e.g., does not have symptoms or has not had close contact with a person with COVID-19).
- Individuals should limit interactions and avoid travel (except when traveling alone in a private vehicle) while awaiting COVID-19 test results.
- Individuals who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 need to stay home (isolate) [until it is safe to be around others](#). This might mean traveling alone in a private vehicle or staying on campus longer than planned.
- Individuals who have had [close contact](#) with someone with COVID-19, even if they test negative, should continue monitoring for symptoms and following all [precautions](#) for the full 14 days after the last exposure. This also applies to fully vaccinated close contacts. Close contacts need to stay home (quarantine) [until it is safe to be around others](#). There are [some exceptions](#) (i.e., for fully vaccinated or recently recovered people).
- Individuals who test negative for COVID-19 and have not had known contact with someone with COVID-19 should continue to follow the core COVID-19 [prevention steps](#). Exposure and infection could still occur after the negative result and before arriving at home.

Activities While at Home

Fully vaccinated people may resume many of their normal activities. Some considerations regarding activities for students/staff members are as follows:

- After travel, people should monitor their health for 14 days. Anyone who is not fully vaccinated should always follow all recommendations (e.g., [wearing a mask](#), [physical distancing](#), [avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces](#), [handwashing](#)).

- A student/staff member who is not fully vaccinated should use a separate bedroom and bathroom for the first two weeks, if possible. They should always follow all recommendations (e.g., [wearing a mask](#), [physical distancing](#), [avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces](#), and [handwashing](#)).
- Limit the size, frequency, and duration of social interactions if not all individuals in the group are fully vaccinated. In general, crowds and poorly ventilated spaces should be avoided and smaller groups are safer than larger groups; fewer interactions are safer than many interactions; and shorter interactions are safer than longer interactions. Other factors should also be considered, such as the location of the gathering (outdoor gatherings are generally safer than indoor gatherings), vaccination status of the people at the gathering, and the behavior of people at the gathering. For more information, see [here](#).
- Be particularly conscientious about following the core COVID-19 prevention steps when around older adults and people of any age with [certain medical conditions](#) who are more likely to develop severe COVID-19, or who are not fully vaccinated.

Quarantine and Isolation Recommendations

- People who have been exposed to COVID-19 need to stay home (quarantine) [until it is safe to be around others](#) with [some exceptions](#) (i.e., for fully vaccinated or recently recovered people).
- Anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should [get tested](#), monitor their health for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days following their last exposure, and follow all [prevention](#) recommendations (e.g., [wearing a mask](#), [physical distancing](#), [avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces](#), [handwashing](#)). People who tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered, do not need to get tested after exposure as long as they do not have symptoms but should monitor for symptoms and follow prevention recommendations for the full 14-day period after their last exposure.
- Staying home for 14 days is the safest option. Those who are not able to stay home for 14 days and do not have symptoms may leave home earlier; visit [VDH's What to do if you were potentially exposed to coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)?](#) or [VDH's When is it Safe to be around Others: Ending Isolation in Non-Healthcare Settings](#) infographic for more details.
- Those who need to quarantine and do not stay home for the recommended 14 days should still continue monitoring for symptoms and follow all [recommendations](#) for the full 14-day period after their last exposure.

Anyone who develops any COVID-19 symptoms, even if symptoms are very mild, should isolate from others and get tested as soon as possible. This applies to everyone, regardless of vaccination status. Remain in isolation while awaiting test results. If results are positive for COVID-19, continue to isolate until meeting the [criteria for ending isolation](#).

Additional Disease Prevention Recommendations

- Any student who is partially vaccinated (i.e., received one dose of a two-dose vaccine series) before returning home should get their second dose wherever they are able. It is essential that they receive both doses. They can search for local vaccine providers at [vaccines.gov](#) or [vaccinate.virginia.gov](#) or call 877-VAX-IN-VA (877-829-4682) to schedule over the phone. Some students may be eligible for an [additional dose](#) or a [booster dose](#) of vaccine as well.
- Prevention of influenza (flu) is also important during flu season. The best way to prevent flu is with a [flu vaccine](#). A flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months old and older, every year. Because it takes the body about two weeks after getting a flu vaccine to develop

protection, students are recommended to get the flu vaccine at least two weeks before returning home during flu season.

Additional Resources

- CDC: Health Department Directories
www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/index
- VDH: Travelers
www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/coronavirus/travel
- VDH: Testing Sites
www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/
- VDH: Social Gatherings and Public Spaces
www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/schools-workplaces-community-locations/social-gatherings/

Revision History

Summary of changes made on November 15, 2021 since the previous version

- Added a table with updated information about testing requirements and recommendations for individuals who choose to travel. Information addresses domestic and international travel by vaccination status and the requirement for noncitizens and nonimmigrants who are 18 years of age or older to be fully vaccinated before entering the United States.
- Added that an additional dose of a mRNA vaccine is recommended for people with moderately or severely weakened immune systems and that a booster dose is recommended for certain people who are fully vaccinated.

Summary of changes made on September 1, 2021 since the previous version

- Added note that the revision history is listed at the end of document
- Reordered information and added “Background” to the Table of Contents
- Simplified language and linked out appropriate CDC and VDH recommendations for additional detail and information

Summary of changes made on June 17, 2021 since the previous version

- Updated recommendations for fully vaccinated people and defined fully vaccinated and not fully vaccinated.
- Added that guidance for fully vaccinated individuals also applies to individuals fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use by WHO.
- Added the recommendation that students and staff get fully vaccinated before returning home, general prevention steps for everyone and considerations for people with weakened immune systems.
- Updated the mask requirements and recommendations in Virginia.
- Updated guidance for cleaning and disinfection.
- Updated travel and testing recommendations for fully vaccinated people and added recommendations for people who have recently recovered from COVID-19.
- Added resources for partially vaccinated students and staff to access second doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

- Specified that the recommendation to get a flu vaccine before returning home applies only during flu season.

Summary of changes made on March 12, 2021 since the previous version

- Updated information about testing recommendations for fully vaccinated people.
- Added a link to some exceptions to masking and distancing for fully vaccinated people.
- Updated links to Third Amended Executive Order 72.
- Added that people should wait to travel until two weeks after completing their vaccine series and added the definition of a complete vaccine series. The document previously stated that people should wait for two weeks after receiving their second dose.

Summary of changes made on February 18, 2021 since the previous version

- Updated language on required testing for persons traveling from another country in 'COVID-19 Testing'
- Added language on quarantine recommendations, based on updated CDC and VDH guidelines for updated quarantine recommendations following vaccination in 'COVID-19 Testing'
- Added CDC and Virginia travel recommendations for required face mask wearing on public transportation and in transportation hubs to the 'Travel' section
- Updated Virginia-specific language about masks mask wearing requirements for indoor and outdoor settings to the 'Core Prevention' section

Summary of changes made on December 16, 2020 since the previous version

- Inserted a hyperlink to link the 'close contact' phrase with the 'What to do if you're exposed' webpage
- Updated travel recommendations for IHE students and staff based on VDH travel recommendations
- Inserted a hyperlink to link the 'non-essential activities' phrase with CDC's 'Essential errands' webpage
- Added language on quarantine recommendations, based on updated CDC and VDH guidelines for opting to end quarantine early
- Added language about masks being worn in indoor and outdoor settings where a distance of six feet cannot be maintained between individuals and others who are not from the same household to the 'Core Prevention' section