



August 15, 2022

Preparing for the Fall Semester

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you have had a nice summer. With some of our traditional beginning of year events scheduled for this week—Wabash Family Picnic, Teaching and Learning Opening Workshop, and Ides of August—I wanted to provide an update on our current thinking related to management of COVID-19. This approach has been developed in Healthy Campus Task Force discussions over the past month, and is reinforced by [new CDC guidance](#) that was issued last week.

As compared to two years ago, we know much more about COVID and have many more defenses to help us manage its impact. Rapid tests are readily available. Vaccines are very effective at reducing severe illness. We know that high-quality (N95, KN95, Kf94) masks provide strong [protection for the wearer](#), and are endorsed by our health staff for their protective qualities. We also now have antivirals that further combat the effects of COVID. I encourage you to take steps to protect your health, including staying up-to-date on boosters and choosing to mask should your preferences and personal and family health warrant. Undoubtedly, there will be some COVID-related disruptions this fall—as there are from illnesses every year on a college campus—but our tools are more plentiful and effective than earlier in the pandemic.

As we enter the year, masks will be optional in public indoor spaces, including classrooms. We have arrived at this approach to masking based on the widespread availability of the aforementioned tools and because the CDC currently classifies the Montgomery County COVID-19 Community Level as low. We will continue to monitor COVID in the community using metrics like the [CDC community level ratings](#) and the prevalence of COVID on campus. For example, if the Montgomery County rating returns to red, meaning a high community level based on infection and hospitalization data, we will reevaluate our strategy, potentially moving back to the “faculty choice” model whereby faculty may choose whether masks are required in their classes, or make other adjustments for large indoor events. You may, however, continue to request students and others to mask in your private office space. It is generally a good practice to have a mask with you on campus, and please be respectful of the needs of others. Any member of the Wabash community may continue wearing a mask if they desire.

Our [COVID-19 information page](#) is updated regularly with guidance on what community members should do if they are exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, are symptomatic, or test positive. We continue to digest the new CDC guidance but, in brief, those exposed as a close contact should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days and test on day five (day zero is the last date of contact). Those who are symptomatic should be tested and mask at least until COVID-19 is ruled out. Those who test positive should isolate—and not attend in-person class or come to campus—before retesting on day five (first day of symptoms or a positive test is day zero). If symptoms have improved and a follow-up test is negative, the individual may return to normal activities but should continue to mask through day 10.



To help better move infectious individuals to isolation, living unit leaders will have access to tests that students may use after hours and on weekends as well as instructions about moving students who test positive to home or campus isolation. In addition, the Student Health Center will supply some potential syllabus language that you might use to help guide students on issues like class attendance and seeking medical care when they are experiencing symptoms, much like the guidance that is sent from the Counseling Center and academic support services. Students will typically contact faculty directly about illness-related absences.

We are also monitoring developments related to [monkeypox](#) and its possible appearance in the community. Health informational signs will soon be placed around campus. Anyone who believes they have been exposed should monitor themselves for symptoms for 21 days following exposure. Students should contact the Health Center. Isolation for a confirmed case of monkeypox can last 21 or more days. This will necessitate additional accommodations by faculty.

As was the case last year, in-person instruction will be the norm, but it is understood that personal and family health will at times necessitate temporary adjustments. Planning around COVID is no doubt difficult, and I expect most of us have become more accustomed to that than we would like. Our COVID management efforts will be regularly monitored and are always subject to change based on new information and conditions as we continue our progression toward resuming normal routines. Your understanding and many efforts to provide students with an exceptional Wabash experience are much appreciated and highly valued.

Take care,

Todd

Todd McDorman
Dean of the College