



HOWARD
UNIVERSITY

EMPLOYEE RETURN TO WORK PLAN



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A phased-in return to campus plan is provided in the following document. This plan is a conditions-based, three-phase plan prepared to safely and conscientiously return staff and faculty to campus. The phases have been developed based on the current guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the DC Department of Health, as well as a review of other best practices to support the successful reentry of our campus community. Currently, the District of Columbia is in Phase II of the District's Reopening Plan, with limits on building capacity set at 25 percent of occupancy. Additionally, groups and meetings may convene indoors with a limit of 10 individuals.

The purpose of this plan is to provide broad guidance in the development of University-wide and departmental-specific plans to support the safe return of employees to campus and guide the conduct of academic, research, and student support activities in anticipation of a summer pilot of courses and broader expansion of the student and employee footprint for the Fall 2021 semester. The success of our efforts to return employees to campus will depend largely on the commitment of each individual to exercise good judgment and common sense towards compliance with the guidance and plans provided in this document. **As COVID-19 vaccine supplies are more readily available to the wider population, faculty and staff are strongly urged to receive the vaccine when it is made available to them.**

The plan to phase in the return of employees to campus is designed in alignment with the tenets that have guided our decisions throughout the COVID-19 crisis:

- Howard University will make decisions guided primarily by considerations for the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff and the surrounding community.
- Decisions about health and safety made by the University in the context of COVID-19 will be evidence-based and data-driven where data is available.
- Howard University will continue to deliver an exceptional education and optimal services within the unavoidable constraints of the COVID-19 response.
- Howard University will continue to ensure that essential personnel are readily available to support the operational and customer service needs of the University community.
- Howard University will be transparent when communicating to our entire University body and our community.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

The Facilities Management team will work to ensure the buildings are prepared for reentry in accordance with the facilities readiness plan. Employees and students may have concerns of returning to the campus; preparing for and communicating how safety is a top priority is the primary approach to allaying these concerns. Safety measures include:

- implementing employee health screening procedures;
- developing employee health and safety training;
- developing an exposure-response plan that addresses:
 - isolation, containment and contact tracing procedures;
 - stay-at-home requirements; and
 - exposure communications to affected staff.
- providing personal protective equipment (PPE), such as:

- masks, gloves, face shields, etc.; and
- personal hand sanitizer.
- detailing [cleaning procedures](#) and procuring ongoing supplies;
- applying methods to improve ventilation, including:
 - increasing the introduction of outside air, when possible;
 - using fans to improve the effectiveness of open windows;
 - improving central air filtration;
 - using high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration where possible, and considering portable units; and
 - using [ultraviolet germicidal irradiation \(UVGI\)](#) as a supplemental treatment to inactivate SARS-CoV-2, as feasible.
- implementing a COVID-19 workforce vaccination strategy to include:
 - [communicating](#) with employees about the vaccine;
 - surveying employees regarding their intentions to receive the vaccine;
 - developing a voluntary vaccination policy; and
 - addressing religious or disability accommodation requests.
- establishing [physical distancing measures](#) within the workplace, such as:
 - staggering shifts and lunch/rest breaks;
 - rotating weeks in the office and working remotely;
 - moving workstations to increase separation distance; and
 - implementing one-way traffic patterns throughout workplace, if necessary.
- restricting business travel:
 - prohibiting business travel, except for unusual circumstances that require sign off by a senior University official; and
 - following District of Columbia guidance to ease restrictions over time.
- defining customer and/or visitor contact protocols, such as:
 - directing customer traffic through workplace;
 - limiting the number of customers in any area at one time;
 - avoiding handshake greetings, remaining 6 ft. apart;
 - using video or telephone conferencing instead of in-person client meetings; and

- providing contactless pickup and delivery of mail and procured products;

and

- understanding and complying with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) record-keeping and reporting obligations:
 - Identify positions, if any, with the potential for occupational exposure to the coronavirus.
 - Review OSHA regulation 29 CFR § 1904 to determine work-relatedness of illnesses.

PRIOR TO RETURN

Prior to the return of employees, it is critical that the University's communication campaign is robust and that the messaging is timely, consistent, direct and accurate. Townhalls and webinars with health experts have been the University's first phase response to educating stakeholders. The next phase of the communication plan may involve "everyday employees and students" who can carry the message. The activity at the Numa Adams vaccination clinic can be captured and publicized via WHUR and WHUT. An ongoing vaccination campaign is needed.

Managers should be trained to engage their direct reports and provide them an opportunity to voluntarily raise any scheduling considerations and/or reasonable accommodation requests related to COVID-19 prior to their return. To do so, managers should inform their direct reports, prior to their return to work, that they may voluntarily raise any disability accommodations related to the employee's own disability with Human Resources. Managers are reminded of the importance of ensuring that all communications and interactions with employees are consistent with federal and District of Columbia Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws. All other requests or considerations that are not related to the employee's own disability or health condition, such as childcare challenges, should typically be handled by managers. Requests for leave due to the employee's own disability or health condition should be handled by the employee's supervisor and/or HR depending on the relevant circumstances.

PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

We will continue to require implementation of public health measures. No person may enter University grounds and facilities without wearing a face covering, unless formally exempted due to a medical condition or disability or is a visitor under the age of two. Signs will continue to be posted to remind people of the public health measures, including:

- washing hands or using hand sanitizer upon entry;
- using a face covering for the duration of their visit;
- maintaining social/physical distancing based on markings and occupancy limits posted; and
- following current departmental office entry policy, addressing matters such as meetings by appointment only or remote accessibility.

As vaccine supplies are made available to the wider population, faculty and staff are strongly urged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it is made available to them. Additionally, please note that more access to and use of the vaccines may result in policy changes and mandates.

HIGH RISK EMPLOYEES

Some employees may be at greater risk of contracting and suffering acute symptoms from COVID-19.

In these instances, departmental managers should contact the Office of Human Resources and be as flexible as possible to devise work options or accommodations for those employees.

PHASES OF CAMPUS REENTRY

The three phases of our campus reentry plan are described below. Our plan is contingent upon national and local public health guidelines, which will continue to evolve, and the current state of the pandemic. It is anticipated that implementation of each phase will require approximately four to eight weeks of downward trending of COVID-19 infection. During each phase of the plan, the University will be guided by the following conditions:

- conditions of the District of Columbia Reopening Plan (the phased-in reentry plan is dependent upon building capacity limits provided by the District);
- the COVID-19 vaccination rates of our employees and students;
- the number cases and positivity rate of COVID-19 on campus;
- overall improvement in the numbers of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19 in our neighboring community;
- successful use of the daily symptom screening for employees and students;
- testing, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation capabilities established on campus, to include exposure protocols; and
- the University's infrastructure and the number of faculty and staff returning to the on-campus workforce supports the return of students.

Our plan may need to be updated should the trajectory of the pandemic change or if the prevailing public health guidelines change. We will share additional updates about our plans as new information becomes available.

PHASE I (TENTATIVE START DATE WEEK OF MAY 3, 2021)

During Phase I, departments/units will bring no more than 25 percent of their workforce back to campus at any given time. **Only employees deemed essential to support academic, research and extracurricular activities should be scheduled to return to campus during this period.** A gradual approach to resuming increased research activities will also be implemented using additional research-specific guidelines. We will use Phase I to test our ability to assess systems and procedures, address concerns identified and maintain appropriate safety measures to protect our community. Departments/units should use the time during Phase I to better understand workplace conditions in the context of relevant health and safety measures and make adjustments, as necessary, in preparation for the summer course pilot.

Employees will return to the office in a limited capacity and only to the extent necessary to support institutional operations, research and teaching activities, student support services, athletics and the essential needs of the returning students, faculty, and staff. Employees who return during Phase I are strongly encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is made available to them.

Employees who are high-risk with health vulnerabilities, should not return during Phase I and should

continue working remotely. ***Employees that can effectively work from home, and whose presence is not required to directly support the return of students and University functions should also continue working remotely.***

If the conditions are met, continuation to Phase II will be assessed and considered after a period of four to eight weeks, contingent upon the District's modification of building capacity limits beyond 25 percent capacity.

PHASE II (TENTATIVE START DATE BETWEEN JUNE 1-JULY 1, 2021)

Phase II will overlap with the Summer II pilot. Summer classes officially begin on June 23, but students would be required to present to campus as early as June 1 for RAs and June 9 for summer school attendees. During Phase II, departments/units will bring no more than an additional 25 percent of their workforce back to campus (total employees should not exceed approximately 50 percent of respective office building capacity at any given time) for the purpose of increasing operational capacity and supporting activities on campus. Although a complete/full return to normal campus operations are not anticipated during Phase II, departments/units should enhance preparations for the return of students for the fall semester. All public health guidelines and safety requirements continue to apply and must be implemented by departments/units. If all conditions are met, continuation to Phase III will be considered after a period of four weeks.

PHASE III (TBD)

During Phase III, the remaining workforce (excluding employees who have been authorized or directed to continue to work from home consistent with a departmentally approved telework policy or a reasonable accommodation granted by Human Resources) will be returned to campus to conduct final preparations for the 2021-22 academic year and the full return of our students. All public health guidelines and safety requirements continue to apply and must be implemented by departments/units.

The University will continue to monitor the trajectory of COVID-19 trends in the District, metropolitan areas, and nationally and will update our plan as necessary. In the meantime, weekly testing for all employees working on campus and twice a week testing for health profession school will continue.

STAGGERED SCHEDULING

Departments should use the tools at their disposal to ensure appropriate social/physical distancing in the workplace. A combination of telework, adjusting employees' hours of duty, and compressed scheduling are important to assure that we comply with current public health guidelines related to social distancing and decreased office capacities.

REMOTE WORK

Telecommuting may have proven to work well during the pandemic for some divisions. Using it not only as a short-term emergency tool but also as a permanent measure will be considered.

Points to consider include:

- continuing to allow remote work where practicable (i.e., when employees can effectively perform their essential duties remotely);
- staggering weeks of in office and remote work among team members, or part-time remote work on alternate weekdays;

- responding to employee requests to continue to work from home, including long-term arrangements;
- updating technology to support remote work; and
- considering the long-term cost savings or productivity impact of offering permanent remote work.

DISTRICT'S CURRENT TRAVEL GUIDANCE (HIGH-RISK STATES)

“Until such time as guidance modifies the quarantine and testing rules, visitors to the District from high-risk states, and residents returning from travel to high-risk states outside the District-Maryland-Virginia region are required to limit activity to performing essential activities until after receiving a negative COVID-19 test, three (3) to five (5) days after arrival, under the conditions set forth in Mayor’s Order 2020-110 and DC Health guidance.

Individuals who are fully vaccinated are not required to self-quarantine or test if their travel occurs within ninety (90) days following their last dose of the vaccine.”

CURRENT UNIVERSITY TRAVEL GUIDANCE

All University-sponsored travel, both international and domestic, continues to be prohibited until further notice, and should not be planned or scheduled at this time. This applies to all Howard University community members—students, faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, etc. We encourage everyone to consider other options including online meetings and virtual conferences. Justified exceptions will be limited and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The request must be submitted for approval to a senior University official.

We also strongly discourage non-essential personal travel, both international and domestic. Beyond the health and safety risks, we are increasingly concerned about travel restrictions being implemented that may impact the return of individuals engaged in international travel. In addition to potential restrictions that may be under consideration by the federal government, foreign governments are also imposing additional border and travel controls.

CURRENT CDC GUIDANCE REGARDING TRAVEL (APRIL 2, 2021)

(For vaccinated individuals) “Given recent studies evaluating the real-world effects of vaccination, CDC recommends that fully vaccinated people can travel at low risk to themselves. A person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the last recommended dose of vaccine. Fully vaccinated people can travel within the United States and do not need COVID-19 testing or post-travel self-quarantine as long as they continue to take COVID-19 precautions while traveling – wearing a mask, avoiding crowds, socially distancing, and washing hands frequently.

“The guidance issued April 2, 2021 does not change the agency’s existing guidance for people who are not fully vaccinated. Unvaccinated travelers should still get tested 1-3 days before domestic travel and again 3-5 days after travel. They should stay home and self-quarantine for 7 days after travel or 10 days if they don’t get tested at the conclusion of travel. CDC discourages non-essential domestic travel by those who are not fully vaccinated.”

As additional numbers of faculty, staff and students obtain COVID-19 vaccines, the University will review the current prohibition on University-supported domestic and international travel.

POLICY CHANGES

Policy changes up for consideration include:

- adjusting paid-leave policies to reflect regulatory requirements and actual business needs;
- relaxing attendance policies to encourage sick employees to stay home;
- clarifying time-off request procedures to indicate when time off can be required by the employer, should sick employees need to be sent home;
- implementing flexible scheduling options to allow for compressed workweeks and flexible start and stop times;
- adjusting meal and rest break policies adjusted to stagger times and processes implemented to encourage physical distancing;
- updating travel policies to reflect essential versus nonessential travel and the impact of domestic or global travel restrictions;
- detailing telecommuting policies to reflect the type of work that can be done remotely and the procedures for requesting telework; and
- revising information technology policies to reflect remote work hardware, software and support.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANS

We have learned valuable lessons regarding the University's business continuity plans during the past year. If a business continuity plan does not exist, make sure to implement one. Revisions should be made to existing business continuity plans, based on lessons learned:

- Include infectious disease control if the current plan did not include this language prior to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Amend existing plans to include the latest emergency information, such as updates on epidemics and workplace considerations or changes in protocols for responding to global disasters.
- Update plan resources and contact information to ensure accuracy.
- Establish a pandemic task force to continuously monitor external and internal data and implement appropriate protocols. Recognize the possibility of additional closings during this current pandemic as COVID-19 infections may rise and fall again, triggering more stay-at-home orders and supply chain disruptions.
- Perform testing and exercises to practice the new or revised emergency plans to make sure employees know what to do and to find any missing parts that need to be addressed before another emergency occurs.

REFERENCES:

1. District of Columbia Return to Work Guide. Rev. January 29, 2021. [District Government Return to Work Guide.pdf \(dc.gov\)](#).
2. District of Columbia Reopening Plan. <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/stay-home>. Accessed April 2, 2021.
3. Howard University Reopening Plan. <https://home.howard.edu/pandemic-response/protocol>. Accessed April 2, 2021.
4. CDC Issues Updated Guidance on Travel for Fully Vaccinated People. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0402-travel-guidance-vaccinated-people.html>. Accessed April 2, 2021.
5. COVID -19 Back to Work Checklist. <https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/Pages/covid-19-back-to-work-checklist.aspx>. Accessed April 5, 2021.

SAMPLE DEPARTMENT PLAN FOR RETURNING TO CAMPUS

Sample plan for reopening the XXX Department

The department has 25 employees:

- department Chair;
- administrative assistant;
- 3 graduate students and
- 20 faculty members.

OFFICE DESCRIPTION

The department occupies 23 office spaces in AAA Building. The main department office (222 AAA Building) is a suite that houses the administrative assistant and advisor in the outer area and the department head in a connected office. The general office receives some visitors, usually students or deliveries from other departments. The graduate students are located in 226 AAA Building, which is a small office with two side-by-side desks. All of these employees' desks are at least six feet apart. Each of the 20 faculty members has their own individual office in AAA Hall.

PROPOSED REOPENING PROCESS

1. Open general office for department chair and administrative assistant to work full-time in the office.
 - a. The department chair and administrative assistant both require access to on-campus systems, which are more easily accessible from campus than from home.
 - b. No more than two additional people will be allowed in the general office area at one time and strict social/physical distancing must be maintained with masks required.
 - c. Visitors (University community) will be asked to remain near the door, maintaining social/physical distancing from the administrative assistant. Only one visitor will be allowed in the office at any one time. Other visitors will be asked to stay in the hallway and maintain social/physical distance as well.
 - d. Hand sanitizer will be placed near the door to the office.
2. Open graduate student work area for one graduate student at a time. Graduate students work on projects for the department. They need occasional access to on-campus IT. They will work in alternate times during the week, assuring that only one will be in the office at a time.
3. Open faculty offices on a limited basis according to the following priorities:
 - a. Some faculty will work in a hybrid environment, teaching remotely, and also coming to campus for teaching and other obligations. Ten of the faculty have indicated that this would be their plan. They will need to occasionally come to the office for instruction and to pick up some items, references and books.
 - b. Faculty who have ineffective internet connections or poor technology at home will be allowed to return to their office spaces. There are three faculty members who are in this group.
 - c. Faculty who must be on campus to conduct their research will be allowed to return to their offices and labs. This applies to the remaining seven faculty members. All will resume their research based on the timeline and phases in the research reawakening plan.
4. Faculty and staff will be discouraged from congregating in groups, and when necessary, they must abide by social/physical distancing guidelines and wear protective masks.
5. While no meetings are scheduled at this time, any face-to-face meetings that are necessary will be conducted using appropriate social/physical distancing, and all attendees will be required to wear masks.

6. All faculty and staff will be encouraged to use Zoom for meetings when possible.

ASSURANCES FROM THE REOPENING DEPARTMENT

We will abide by all criteria established for operation during Phase II of the reopening plan. This includes the following:

- Continue to allow a liberal telework policy that allows for building capacity restrictions and social/physical distancing guidelines to be maintained. We will promote strict social/physical distancing measures in the office and in the building.
- We will require all employees to wear face masks when interacting with others or when in transit inside or outside the building.
- Masks will be provided.
- We will require individuals who test positive to remain in isolation for at least seven days from symptom onset or 72 hours fever-free, whichever is longer — or current public health official guidance.
- We will make hand sanitizer and antiseptic cleaning materials available in our office to ensure good hand washing and hygiene practices.
- Employees will be required to clean their work area at the beginning and the end of each workday.
- We will not hold any social gatherings of more than 10 individuals.



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