

Back-to-the-Workplace Guidance

March 22 - September 10, 2021 (Spring and Summer)



Governor Inslee's [Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery](#) plan sets out phases put in place to stem the COVID-19 pandemic. The state has also issued [guidelines for higher education institutions](#) and requirements for COVID-19 prevention in the workplace (via the Department of Labor and Industries). These state guidelines and requirements govern the University's ability to gradually reopen in a safe way as the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic improve.

As Washington State advances to Phase 3 of the Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery plan, this document provides updated guidance for UW campuses, units and personnel as they prepare to return to the workplace in advance of autumn quarter. Notably:

- This guidance is relevant for the period of March 22-September 10, 2021 *regardless of Phase 3 or Phase 4 status*. However, if the health situation deteriorates on a campus or locally, units will need to be prepared to return to prior phases as needed and directed.
- **Specific guidance for autumn quarter and beyond, including campus vaccination policies, will be provided as state guidelines are updated and state vaccination efforts progress.**
- A key constraint for summer and fall operations will be state requirements for physical distancing. Currently, the state requires six feet of physical distancing in the classroom and workplace, with exceptions only in exceptional cases and with additional PPE and/or other safety measures. This is the case *regardless of vaccination status*. A change in this requirement by the state will be necessary before significant return to in-person work or instruction can occur on campus given space capacity limitations. We anticipate the state will review distancing and density guidelines in late spring or early summer.

Key considerations for spring and summer operations

- While COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have stabilized, the arrival of [new COVID-19 variants](#) in the region require continued caution.
- Vaccination efforts are underway, but supply remains a challenge and the state expects it will take into the summer for all adults to be vaccinated.
- State guidelines still require six feet of distancing in classrooms and the workplace, and density restrictions remain in place for specific university functions (housing and dining, gyms, museums, performing arts spaces, spectator sports, youth programs).
- State guidelines still require face covering/masking requirements in all University spaces.

- Employee support structures – such as public transportation, K-12 schools, and childcare – are slowly recovering but are anticipated to remain constrained into the late spring and early summer.

What is changing for spring and summer operations (March 22-September 10, Phase 3 or Phase 4)

- To the extent it does not impact necessary operations, the university is extending telework flexibility to employees through September 10, 2021 (extended from June 30, 2021). If an employee can telework and it does not impede operations, they should be allowed to do so.
- If an employee *can* telework but would *prefer* to come to campus, unit leaders may authorize employees to return to the work environment so long as it is safe and operationally feasible. Any unit authorizing additional employees to return to campus must:
 - Follow the [Environmental Health & Safety \(EH&S\) On-site Work Preparation Checklist](#)
 - Update their unit COVID-19 Prevention Plans, including identification of site supervisors (or designees) to actively monitor compliance with COVID-19 Prevention Plans
 - Work with Building Coordinators to review [building readiness guidelines](#) and ensure spaces can be accessed and re-occupied in a safe manner
 - Encourage employees to sign up for [Husky Coronavirus Testing](#) and [WANotify](#)
- Many essential/critical employees have been working in person on campus throughout the pandemic. As we prepare to return to “new normal” campus operations in the fall, it may be operationally necessary to call additional employees back to on-site work prior to September 10. In cases where an employee has been teleworking but is now needed in person to support operations as your unit prepares for an autumn quarter return, **units must provide employees with at least 30 days’ notice** before they ask them to report back to work in person. Exceptions can be made for emergency situations and in accordance with relevant collective bargaining agreements.
- Virtual meetings and small gathering are still strongly encouraged. However, in-person work or academic and other University-related meetings and gatherings may occur under the following conditions:
 - Total attendees are within [space capacity/occupancy limitations](#) as dictated by health guidelines (distancing, masking, cleaning)
 - A COVID-19 Site Supervisor is available and appropriate personnel are on site to monitor compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols
 - Employees who are currently teleworking are not required to come to work in person unless it is required to support critical unit operations (including autumn quarter reopening)
 - Units have worked with Building Coordinators to review [building readiness guidelines](#) and ensured building can be accessed and re-occupied in a safe manner

- Guidance for specific UW functions (housing and dining, gyms, museums, performing arts spaces, spectator sports, youth programs) will be updated to align with state guidelines in appropriate phases.
- [Events guidance](#) has been updated to both incorporate state guidelines and specific university operational needs. Regardless of state capacity allowances, any events of more than 100 people will require EH&S review. Any in-person [commencement or graduation events](#), to the extent determined allowable, will receive specific, separate events guidance.
- We want all eligible University employees to get vaccinated. In the event an employee is unable to secure an appointment outside of work hours, the university is granting employees up to two hours of release time (per shot) to get vaccinated. Employees should work with their managers to ensure that time away from work doesn't impede critical operations. Managers may also use their discretion to grant additional time away as appropriate and reasonable. Managers may request to see proof of vaccination if time off is granted during normal working hours.

What will NOT change for spring and summer operations (March 22-September 10, Phase 3 or Phase 4) – *regardless of vaccination status*

- The state still requires six feet of distancing in the classroom or the workplace. Until the state changes these guidelines, units need to adhere to this requirement and associated capacity restrictions.
- The state and University still require masks/face coverings. The University policy can be found [at the EH&S site](#).
- Any employee who is sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, *regardless of vaccination status*, must stay home. Employees with COVID-19 symptoms should also get tested and are required to notify the UW Environmental Health & Safety COVID-19 Response and Prevention team (covidehc@uw.edu) if they test positive.
- High-risk employees requesting accommodation [must be accommodated](#).

Planning for autumn quarter

The University intends to safely welcome the Husky community back to campuses this fall. We understand that transition back to “new normal” operations will require time and patience, and the objective of extending telework flexibility through September 10 is to allow units to plan, employees to get vaccinated, and for our employee support structures to stabilize.

Here are some things everyone can do to help ensure we can be together safely:

- Stay healthy – Wash your hands, wear a mask, and watch your distance.

- Get vaccinated – More information about state eligibility criteria and vaccination opportunities [is available at uw.edu/coronavirus](https://uw.edu/coronavirus).
- Take care of yourself and each other – The pandemic has had a profound impact on many. Be patient and be kind.

Here are some things unit leadership can do to help ensure we can be together safely:

- Keep your COVID-19 prevention plans up-to-date and monitor practices.
- Remember that your decisions have impact on others. Decisions to bring people back to work, hold events, or increase operations requires additional support from our University essential workers – please be mindful of their health and safety and workload demands. Also, units in shared or co-located spaces will need to make sure that they are working with their “neighbors” to keep spaces clean and safe. Keep lines of communication open, request support early so central services have time to plan and, when in doubt, ask for help.
- Consider your actions not only from a “COVID safety” lens, but also an equity lens. Pay particular attention to essential worker and caregiver supports.
- Communicate early and often with your employees. To the greatest extent possible, make sure that any changes in their work status or requirements are made and communicated with time for them to plan and transition.
- Stay tuned for new policy guidance as state health restrictions change, and we re-assess current university policies for telework/remote work.

Here are some things the University is doing to ensure we can be together:

- Developing strategies to expand convenient, safe vaccine access for UW students, faculty and staff as supplies and eligibility expand
- Continuing to support [Husky Coronavirus Testing](#) to allow access to free and convenient testing for students, faculty and staff coming to campuses
- Monitoring all state and local COVID-19 regulations and requirements and advocating for safe strategies so we can return to “new normal” operations
- Advocating for state and federal support to mitigate COVID-19 financial losses and impacts

Planning for a “new normal”

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives, our perspectives and our daily habits. Extended remote and hybrid working operations has taught us both the power of technology to expand our reach and impact, and the frustrations of establishing community and connections within the confines of small boxes.

As we plan to return to a “new normal” we need to take the best of what technology and innovation has to offer, while upholding our values as an open, public, community-centered University. UWHR, in consultation with the Executive Office and partners across the University, is updating UW’s pre-pandemic remote work and telework guidance with this balance in mind.

Here is what is in development, **with a goal to have clear guidance to units by the end of March and additional implementation tools available by mid-April.**

- Template for communicating *Notice of Return to On-site Work*
- Updated telework and flex work guidance including a checklist of steps that will need to be reviewed and agreed to by both employee and manager
- Updated telework agreement to support different permutations of telework: remote, hybrid, other (out-of-state)
- Workday tracking of telework eligibility and agreements
- A decision tree that will help managers decide which positions are telework eligible and support equitable and consistent telework approvals
- Training and toolkits that support managing in a hybrid work environment, including best practices in setting performance goals, ensuring accountability, measuring success and maintaining trust
- Training and toolkits for teleworkers to help them understand how UW’s ethics and privacy rules apply to remote work and that set expectations for communications and accountability for assignments regardless of work location
- Updated onboarding and offboarding tools and resources so that they better support teleworking employees
- Checklists that confirm what equipment should be supplied by the department and what a teleworker will need to provide, depending on type of telework arrangement
- Assessment plan to review and improve program components on a routine basis (e.g. using HR Community of Practice, Workday data and climate survey results)

Comprehensive EH&S COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources are located [on the EH&S website](#) and more information is available at uw.edu/coronavirus.

Updates are in process for unit-specific guidance (dining, gyms, etc), events and the “Return to the Workplace” decision tree. Please be patient as our EH&S team catches up with ever-changing state and local guidance.

