COVID-19 Workplace Guidance for Employees

January 2021
COVID-19 has changed the way our university, workplace, and classrooms look and operate.

There are practices and protocols that we ask all members of our community - employees and students alike - to follow. These changes will help ensure safety, health, and well-being of Virginia Tech employees and students and our community.

The following university documents are the foundation for the employee guidelines and space recommendations that you will read in this document:

- June 8, 2020 message from Virginia Tech President Tim Sands
- Transition from Essential-Only Operations to Modified Operations
- Guidelines for Implementation of Public Health Measures
- Community Wellness Commitment

The university has taken many steps to provide a safe workplace for every employee. We ask for your help and partnership in maintaining these steps.

We also ask that every member of our community be kind and understanding and follow our Principles of Community as COVID-19 brings continued changes. An extra bit of kindness can go a long way.

If you have questions, please speak to your supervisor, HR partner, or contact the Division of Human Resources at hrservicecenter@vt.edu or 540-231-9331.
Community Wellness Commitment

Be committed. Be well.

Guided by our Principles of Community and current public health guidelines, we recognize that during the ongoing global pandemic, we must commit to additional measures to mitigate the health risks and care for each other, especially the most vulnerable. Our daily commitment to the health and safety of our community will be an exercise in living out the Virginia Tech motto, Ut Prosim (That I May Serve).

As members of the community, we pledge to care for the health and well-being of others by personally adopting our Community Wellness Commitment:

- **We will** affirm our commitment to the safety, health, and well-being of our campuses and local communities.
- **We will** affirm that we will support the mental well-being of all community members.
- **We will** wear face coverings/masks in public areas.
- **We will** practice physical distancing by maintaining at least 6 feet of distance from others.
- **We will** practice good hygiene, including frequent handwashing and covering coughs or sneezes.
- **We will** stay home and avoid public spaces when not feeling well.
- **We will** contact a health care provider or an urgent care facility if we believe we are sick or have been exposed to the coronavirus.
- **We will** support but avoid contact with those who are sick.
- **We will** follow public health guidelines and medical recommendations to be tested and self-isolate as necessary.
- **We will** make a list of all others with whom we have had close contact, if necessary, to aid in contact-tracing efforts.
Operational Definitions

COVID-19 has introduced new terminology and definitions to all of us. Following are some of these commonly used terms.

Physical Distancing:
Limiting one's potential exposure through deliberate actions such as:
- Minimizing time in public spaces, both in frequency and duration.
- Maximizing distance from others, generally at least six (6) feet of separation.
- Using physical barriers where feasible (e.g., masks, windows).

Vulnerable Individuals:
The CDC identifies vulnerable/high risk individuals as older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions. Those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People 65 years and older.
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including people:
  - With chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma.
  - Who have serious heart conditions.
  - Who are immunocompromised.
  - With severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher).
  - With diabetes.
  - With chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis.
  - With liver disease.

COVID-19 Symptoms:
At this time, symptoms of COVID-19 include:
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell.
- New gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)
Face Masks/Coverings:
A cloth face mask/covering of a material such as cotton, worn to prevent the spread of droplets from the wearer to others. These do not include respirators (e.g., N95s) worn for protection against external hazards.

Isolation:
The act of separating people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick, completely eliminating movement within the community while contagious.

Quarantine:
Separating and restricting the movement of people who were exposed to contagious disease to determine if they are sick.

Virginia Tech Community:
The employees and students of Virginia Tech. Visitors to Virginia Tech are also considered part of the community when on-campus, if not otherwise referenced in context.

Public health practices:
The combination of physical distancing and hygiene practices conducted by the community to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases.

Close contact:
Individuals who were within six (6) feet of the subject for a prolonged period (more than 15 minutes). Consideration should be given to proximity, duration, and whether the subject was wearing a face covering/mask during the potential exposure.
Workplace Guidelines for Virginia Tech Campuses

Virginia Tech has a responsibility to provide a safe environment for our employees to work and for our students to learn. In turn, we are asking for the help of every employee and student to follow the guidelines that are implemented. Please help us by doing your part!

Following are some of the protocols that the university has implemented. Also following are some actions that Virginia Tech is asking every employee to take.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps Virginia Tech is taking to ensure your safety:</th>
<th>What Virginia Tech is asking employees to do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be responsive and flexible to employee concerns.</td>
<td>Follow all university policies and practices. Stay home if you are sick!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced cleaning practices have been put in place across campus. See this page for more information and frequently asked questions.</td>
<td>Maintain personal hygiene best practices, including washing hands, use hand sanitizer, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or use the bend of your elbow when sneezing or coughing, avoid touching your face, do not share personal items, etc.</td>
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<td>Encourage strict adherence to appropriate physical distancing requirements.</td>
<td>Maintain physical distancing practices in the workplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide face coverings/masks and/or face shields as needed and proper guidance for use.</td>
<td>Unless there is a medical reason, wear face coverings/masks at all times unless alone in a closed office, eating or drinking, or driving alone. Face coverings displaying inappropriate images or words are not allowed in the workplace.</td>
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<td>Provide gloves to employees who require them to perform certain job functions, such as handling mail, custodial work, certain trades, and grounds keeping.</td>
<td>Replace handshakes with head nods and waves.</td>
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<td>Steps Virginia Tech is taking to ensure your safety:</td>
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<td>Provide hand sanitizer and refill stations across campus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide cleaning supplies and make them easily accessible so employees can clean their workstations and common areas. Departments can coordinate requests for these items through the <a href="#">Procurement Department planning survey</a>.</td>
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<td>Reduce occupancy in community spaces such as reception areas, lobbies, waiting areas, workrooms, conference/meeting rooms, elevators, and break rooms.</td>
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<td>Post and promote prevention strategies (frequent hand washing, maintain physical distance, know the signs of COVID-19).</td>
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<td>Continue to consider telework for those employees able to perform their full job duties remotely.</td>
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<td>Consider alternative work schedules and use of shifts.</td>
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<td>Provide access to viral testing for students, faculty, or staff with symptoms, and accurate antibody testing as appropriate.</td>
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<th>What Virginia Tech is asking employees to do:</th>
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<td>Employ self-protection while in public spaces.</td>
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<td>Clean spaces before and after use including offices, desks, and shared public spaces when used including shared printers, copiers, microwaves, refrigerators, fax, water cooler, ice machines, coffee pots, chairs, tables, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid office gatherings and unnecessary visitors in the workplace. Use stairwells when transitioning between floors if physically able.</td>
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<td>Follow instructions and guidelines on posted signage.</td>
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<td>Talk to your supervisor or contact <a href="#">ADA and Accessibility Services</a> if you have concerns specific to your circumstances, such as a <a href="#">health condition that places you at high risk</a>.</td>
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<td>If you are concerned about how to protect someone at home while working outside the home, refer to the <a href="#">CDC’s public health guidelines</a>.</td>
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<td>Adhere to public, travel, and other precautions.</td>
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<td>Steps Virginia Tech is taking to ensure your safety:</td>
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<td>Contact tracing, identification, quarantine, and case management process for all persons with COVID-19 symptoms and/or diagnosis and all persons under quarantine after exposure, including placement in isolation/quarantine housing, psychological support, support for basic needs, and ongoing monitoring while isolated.</td>
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<td>Implement close monitoring of employees working on-site, customer and visitor interaction, and other tracking of in-person attendance to facilitate contact tracing in the event of an exposure.</td>
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<td>Provide resources to help employees maintain their mental health and wellness.</td>
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Work and Office Space Recommendations

Following are some specific recommendations for work and office space. Some of these items may be duplicated from the previous information because of their importance. Maintaining a clean work environment is paramount to maintaining the safety of our community.

Cleaning/Sanitizing:

- Facilities uses enhanced cleaning practices across campus. See this page for more information and frequently asked questions.
- Provide sanitizing supplies and make them easy to access for individuals to clean their areas multiple times a day, giving special attention to frequently touched surfaces such as keyboards, phones, and desktops. Departments can coordinate requests for these items through the Procurement Department.
- Replace shared appliances, such as coffee makers or ice/water dispensers, with single use or no touch options. Discourage the use of communal water fountains and encourage the use of filling stations.
- Remove high-touch items such as magazines, brochures, pamphlets, common pens, etc. from reception and waiting areas or other common spaces.
- Provide hand sanitizer at all entrances and high traffic areas.
- Identify and investigate options to implement no/reduced touch options in frequently touched areas such as doors and cabinets.
- Be mindful that a building may be required to be closed for disinfection without notice.

Physical Distancing:

- Reduce occupancy in areas where individuals are likely to congregate and interact such as front desks/reception/waiting areas, break rooms, workrooms, conference rooms, elevators, restrooms, etc.
- Maintain at least six (6) feet between workstations/workers. Place Plexiglas or other barriers in workspaces where people must face each other or are unable to be six (6) feet apart.
- Consider installing Plexiglas or other barriers at high-visited areas such as reception desks and check-in points.
- Remove chairs and desks to ensure proper physical distancing in conference/training rooms, classrooms, and waiting rooms/areas. Identify allowable occupancy in order to control workflow and/or establish maximum attendance.
- Post maximum occupancy in common break areas and configure to accommodate appropriate physical distancing.
- Post suggested occupancy signage at elevator entrances along with a suggestion to use the stairs when transitioning between floors if physically able.
Signage/Wayfinding:

- Semi-permanent COVID-19-related signage has been installed by Virginia Tech in public-facing university spaces in campus locations across the commonwealth, including Blacksburg, Greater Washington, D.C. metro region, Roanoke, and ARECs.
- Departments and colleges should consider additional signage within office suites, labs, front desks, waiting areas, conference rooms, etc. Use the COVID-19 and public health creative resources available for download and self-serve printing.
- Use floor tape or decals to indicate where visitors can stand.
- Consider signage to direct the flow of foot traffic to enhance movement of people and to reduce face-to-face interaction.
Mental and Emotional Well-being:

Disease outbreaks such as the coronavirus pandemic can bring stress and increased levels of fear and anxiety. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.

As always, if you are experiencing a crisis or medical emergency, dial 911.

Following are university, state, and other resources available to assist employees should they need emotional support during this difficult time:

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to offer emotional support to employees.
  - 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 for employees - hokiewellness@vt.edu, 540-231-8878. Also visit the Employee Wellness at Home site for more information and resources.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created this resource related to mental health and coping during COVID-19.

In addition, Cook Counseling Center provides mental and emotional well-being resources for students.

- If you are concerned about any Virginia Tech student being (or becoming) suicidal, please call Cook Counseling Center at 540-231-6557 or one of these other resources. The Cook Counseling Center number can be used during regular office hours or after-hours to speak with a counselor.
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