Ball State University’s COVID-19 Response Plan for Spring 2021 (Students)

Effective December 17, 2020
Last Updated on March 22, 2021
Note: this version contains revisions based primarily on the CDC’s recent updates to its vaccination guidance. The specific sections that have been adjusted are as follows: Section V.C (COVID-19 Vaccinations) and Section V.D (Quarantine).

I. Introduction

Ball State University will continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in a manner that promotes the safety of employees, students, and campus visitors, while furthering the University’s mission and values. BSU's policies and plans are aligned with guidance from government agencies, public health officials, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This pandemic presents a constantly-evolving and dynamic situation, and the University will continue to review and appropriately update policies and plans as more information becomes available.

II. Cardinals Care

This plan outlines policies, protocols, and guidelines to inform members of the University community of actions necessary to promote healthy behaviors. These actions reflect our Enduring Value of Social Responsibility; that is, to care for each other as members of the community. Not adopting these behaviors may unintentionally place others at risk, and may result in corrective action.

Plainly stated, Ball State University's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities (Code) prohibits conduct that causes or threatens harm to the health or safety of another person, both on and off campus. Such conduct can include the failure to follow health and safety protocols, or directives of University officials, related to COVID-19. Thus, a student who is alleged to have engaged in these types of unsafe behaviors may be subject to investigation and adjudication under the Code, which could involve an interim suspension while the matter is pending and the full range of disciplinary measures should the student be found responsible for the conduct, up to and including suspension and expulsion.

III. Additional Information on BSU’s Website

While this plan highlights some key aspects of the University’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not exhaustive. Additional policies, protocols, guidelines and other information can be found on BSU’s COVID-19 Website, and it is expected that employees, students, and others on campus will understand and abide by these as necessary. Some examples of what COVID-related information can be found on the website includes, but is not limited to:

1. Student Pre-Arrival Testing Protocol for Spring 2021
2. COVID-19 Dashboard
3. Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing Protocols
4. COVID-19 Travel Standards
5. Health and Safety Resources
7. Campus Visitors Plan
8. Housing and Residence Life
9. L.A. Pittenger Student Center
10. Information regarding Dining Services, Recreation Services, and the University Libraries
11. Student Life Plan
12. International Student Arrival Plan
IV. Academics

A. Plan for Spring 2021

More details about the academic plan for Spring 2021 will continue to be communicated, but please note the following key components:

1. The University will continue to offer on-campus instruction consistent with prevailing guidance from federal, state, and local public officials. In addition, faculty will continue to prepare courses with sufficient flexibility and adaptability as they did for Fall 2020 to account for the unpredictability of potential issues the pandemic may cause.

2. The Spring 2021 semester will commence on Tuesday, January 19, which is one week later than was originally planned.

3. There will be no spring break.

4. There will be three study days scheduled for February 24, March 23, and April 14. While classes will not be scheduled on these days, they are not University holidays and some academic activities may still be held.

5. Finals will be May 4-7, with a commencement date of May 8.

6. These plans are subject to modification should changes be necessary to respond to the evolving health crisis.

B. Classroom Attendance

Students will receive more information from their course instructors about the nature of their specific courses and expectations. Students will continue to be expected to wear face masks during in-person class sessions, with some exceptions (the full University Face Mask Policy can be found later in this plan).

V. Health Considerations

A. Daily Symptom Self-Check

It is critical for students to understand and be aware of COVID-19 symptoms. Students will be expected to monitor their symptoms every day before coming to campus or leaving their residence halls. If a student experiences symptoms of COVID-19 (without a separate diagnosed cause, e.g., asthma, allergies, etc.), the student should seek medical care, either through the Student Health Center or a primary care provider. A symptomatic student seeking medical care should call in advance to schedule an appointment so that intake procedures are understood prior to arrival.

B. Higher-Risk Populations

According to the CDC, individuals with certain conditions may have an increased risk for COVID-19 infection. Those conditions may include, but are not limited to:

1. Older adults (aged 65 years and older);
2. People with HIV;
3. Asthma (moderate-to-severe);
4. Chronic lung disease;
5. Diabetes;
6. Serious heart conditions;
7. Chronic kidney disease being treated with dialysis;
8. Severe obesity; and
Students returning to campus who have a condition that places them in a higher-risk group, as well as those who are pregnant, should be particularly judicious in taking precautions to protect themselves, including observing the safety practices described further below.

C. COVID-19 Vaccinations

Ball State has entered into an agreement with the Delaware County Health Department (DCHD) regarding a DCHD vaccination site to be held on campus with the support of University personnel. This vaccination site opened on March 19, 2021, with a regular weekly schedule based primarily on the number of vaccines the location will have available for distribution. The site will administer vaccines to members of the Delaware County community, including employees and students of the University, consistent with the State of Indiana’s eligibility guidelines. Pre-registration will be required for an appointment to receive a vaccine at this site. More information is available on this webpage.

Also, as more people become vaccinated, it is important to note that those who have received a vaccine are expected to continue following our safety protocols, including wearing a mask as indicated in the University Face Mask Policy, practicing physical distancing, washing hands frequently, avoiding crowded areas and large gatherings, etc.

D. Quarantine

Students are expected to abide by the CDC’s quarantine guidance. This guidance indicates that an individual should quarantine in the following circumstances:

1. Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period;
2. Providing care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19;
3. Having direct physical contact with a person who has COVID-19 (e.g., hugging or kissing);
4. Sharing eating or drinking utensils with someone who has COVID-19; and
5. Someone with COVID-19 sneezing, coughing, or otherwise getting respiratory droplets on the individual.

While the CDC recommends a 14-day quarantine period as the safest strategy, the CDC’s most recent guidance provides that the quarantine period can end after 10 days if the person experiences no symptoms.

Note that people who have tested positive for COVID-19 do not need to quarantine (or get tested again) for up to 3 months as long as they do not develop symptoms again. In addition, consistent with CDC guidance related to vaccinations, fully vaccinated people are not expected to quarantine (or get tested) after exposure to someone with COVID-19 if they remain asymptomatic.

Students can find more information about quarantine and related matters in BSU’s Screening, Testing, and Contact Tracing Protocols.

VI. Safety Practices

Consistent with our Enduring Value of Social Responsibility, students are asked to be considerate of others and to consistently participate in the safety practices in this plan both on campus and off-campus, as they are intended to help mitigate the risk of transmission and make our campus and community safe.

1. According to the CDC, people are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 when at least two weeks have passed after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose vaccination series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or at least two weeks have passed after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson/Janssen).
A. University Face Mask Policy

i. Requirements

All persons, regardless of whether or not they have received a COVID-19 vaccination—including faculty, staff, students, vendors, contractors, suppliers, and visitors—are required to wear face masks while inside campus buildings, including in classrooms and laboratories. Face masks are also specifically required in the following situations, both on campus and off-campus:

1. When necessary to comply with any applicable governmental face mask orders;
2. When outdoors and in the presence of others if physical distancing is difficult to maintain;
3. When using campus transportation (such as a shuttle bus);
4. When multiple individuals are in a University vehicle; and
5. When it is determined by an employee’s supervisor that wearing a mask is necessary for specific job duties. Environmental Health and Safety will determine if particular types of face masks are required for particular job settings, and this will be communicated through supervisors.

Face masks should be worn so that they cover the individual’s nose and mouth and fit snugly against the sides of the person’s face without gaps. How a face mask is worn and the type of mask utilized should be consistent with CDC guidance. In general, this means the face mask should help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face mask coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. As examples, face masks that are crocheted or beaded would not be considered sufficient for purposes of this policy. The CDC also recommends the use of a mask with multiple layers instead of a mask with only a single layer.

ii. Exceptions

There are certain situations where a face mask is not required to be worn while on campus, as follows:

1. When alone in a private office or work space, but people working in a cubicle or other open area where people are, or could be, in close proximity are expected to wear a mask unless another exception applies;
2. When working behind a plexiglass barrier and ample physical distancing from others can be consistently maintained. This exception would include, for example, when a faculty member is teaching behind a plexiglass barrier in a classroom or laboratory setting, and similar situations, if ample physical distancing from others can be consistently maintained. Nevertheless, those people working behind plexiglass barriers are encouraged to wear a mask, particularly in high-traffic areas;
3. When a student is in their own room in their residence hall;
4. When actively engaged in eating/drinking in an indoor or outdoor space;
5. When an individual has a health condition related to the wearing of a face mask and an accommodation has been granted (see the “Accommodations” section below); and
6. When any exemptions listed in Indiana’s Executive Order 21-06 (or any subsequent Executive Order governing face masks) apply. Note that the University has determined that, at this time, it is unable to effectively arrange its fitness facilities and activities through Recreation Services in a manner that consistently allows for physical distancing and thus has established a “mask required” policy for these facilities and activities; and
7. When an exception has been granted by the Dean or Provost, or the area Vice President. Situations where exceptions may be granted include, but are not necessarily limited to, academic settings where mask-wearing is not practicable (e.g., applied music lessons) and when a job-related reason necessitates the removal of the individual’s face mask while performing a particular task. Any exception granted under this paragraph must be at least as stringent as the face mask directives in Indiana’s Executive Order 21-06 (or any other subsequent Executive Order governing face masks).
iii. Accommodations
If an individual has a health condition related to the wearing of a face mask, University Human Resource Services should be contacted, or, in the case of a student, the Office of Disability Services. When such an issue is raised, an individualized assessment will occur to determine if an exception to this face mask policy will be granted as an accommodation.

iv. Non-Compliance
If an employee declines to wear a face mask as required, the supervisor is responsible for addressing it with the employee. Employees should refrain from addressing non-compliance or perceived non-compliance directly with other employees, and should instead report issues to their supervisors.

If a student declines to wear a face mask as required by University protocol, governmental order or health department mandate, the student should be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students. If the situation occurs in a classroom or other academic setting, it is considered a classroom management issue, and the faculty member should remind the student of the requirement and give the student a chance to comply with it prior to referring the matter to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Members of the public who are not abiding by face mask requirements will first be offered a disposable face mask, if possible. If they refuse to comply with face mask requirements, they will be asked to leave and given options of how they can be served virtually.

Please note that the University Police Department (UPD) is not the initial enforcement mechanism responsible for ensuring compliance with face mask requirements on campus. As such, the expectation is that UPD will not be contacted in the first instance where an individual is simply not wearing a face mask as required by this policy. However, as with other situations where there are concerns of non-compliance with University policies or the law, UPD involvement may be required when a situation escalates due to a person or group refusing to abide by this policy and/or follow directives of University officials. This may result in UPD officers taking action they deem necessary to address the particular situation at hand, including enforcing the directive given by University officials that a non-compliant person leave a building or campus and referring incidents to the appropriate University department for further review.

v. Other Guidance on Face Masks
Individuals may supply their own face mask for general use. In addition, the University will provide up to two washable and reusable face masks to every faculty, staff, and on-campus student who requests them and has not already received them, while supplies last. To obtain a face mask from BSU, employees should contact their direct supervisor.

On-campus students who have not already received their University provided face masks may obtain them from the Information Desk at the L.A. Pittenger Student Center during hours of operation.

Proper use and care of face masks are the responsibility of the individual. For additional guidance on the use and care of face masks, visit the CDC Website and World Health Organization (WHO) Website.

vi. Information Regarding Face Shields
Consistent with CDC guidance, the University does not consider face shields to be an adequate substitute for face masks due to the possibility that droplets could travel under or to the side of the shield if the wearer coughs or sneezes. As such, a face shield may only be utilized when used in conjunction with a face mask or as an approved exception to the face mask policy (such as, for example, a faculty member, tutor, or other employee wearing a face shield in lieu of a face mask when interacting with a student who relies on lip-reading).

B. Physical Distancing
Students on campus and off-campus are expected to maintain appropriate physical distancing in order to reduce the risk of being exposed to or spreading COVID-19. This includes things such as:

1. Maintaining at least a distance of 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people at all times;
2. Avoiding crowded places and mass gatherings;
3. Avoiding physical contact with others, such as hugging and handshakes;
4. Utilizing electronic communications instead of face-to-face interactions where possible; and
5. Avoiding those who appear to be demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19.

The University will also continue to take steps to assist in physical distancing, including reducing the number of employees on campus at a given time, posting signage and utilizing floor markings around campus, installing Plexiglas barriers at employee work stations where there is regular face-to-face contact with others, and adjusting physical spaces in ways to promote physical distancing.

C. Personal Sanitation Measures
Students should maintain good personal sanitation/hygiene, keeping the following in mind:

1. Frequent hand washing is the first line of defense against the spread of COVID-19. Students should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after being in a public places, or after coughing, sneezing, blowing their nose, or touching their face. If soap and water are not readily available, students should use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
2. Students are encouraged to carry their own hand sanitizer.
3. Students are encouraged to bring their own water to minimize use and touching of water fountains (and to use the hands-free, bottle filling stations where available).
4. Students should minimize or avoid sharing personal items, supplies, and equipment with others.

The University will also continue to take steps in order to encourage people on the University's campus to practice good sanitation/hygiene, such as making hand sanitizer available in various locations around campus and displaying hand washing and hygiene posters throughout campus buildings.

D. Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols
The University will continue to make cleaning supplies available for student use in classrooms so they can assist in wiping off surface areas. In addition, the University has implemented the following general cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

1. Deep cleaning will continue to occur at regular intervals based on a building's occupancy and use.
2. Open buildings will continue to be cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis at regular intervals, and as necessary based on occupancy and use.
3. Cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surface areas (such as controls, door handles, elevator panels, railings, copy machines, etc.) will continue to occur on a regular basis.
4. Portable ultraviolet lights will continue to be used in spaces considered higher risk areas.
5. An electrostatic disinfecting sprayer will continue to be utilized where appropriate, such as locker rooms, shower areas, shuttle buses, etc.
6. Additional cleaning measures will be taken if the University is notified that an individual is/was on campus with a positive diagnosis of COVID-19.

VII. Wellness
This pandemic can be stressful both personally and while engaging in campus life. Students should be mindful of their well-being and take steps to cope with this situation in a positive way (e.g., eat healthy, exercise, get sleep, talk with a trusted acquaintance, take breaks from the news and social media, etc.). The CDC has published information about Coping with Stress during this time. In addition, students are encouraged to visit the webpages of the Counseling Center and Office of Health, Alcohol, and Drug Education for more information about resources available through the University.
VIII. General Resources
Please consult the University’s COVID-19 Website for more information on the University’s response to this pandemic. In addition, other general resources include:

1. CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
2. World Health Organization information on COVID-19
3. Prevention and Treatment tips (CDC)
4. Indiana State Department of Health
5. Latest guidelines and updates from the CDC
6. Delaware County Coronavirus Hub

IX. Technology Resources
Information Technology (IT) provides student-focused technology support via services including the Help Desk, Tech Time, the ID Card office, and the Technology Store. Be sure to review the list of IT services to find the best resource for you as well as learn about current hours and support options. Students may also visit the Help Desk website and request assistance by clicking on “Report an Issue” or initiating a chat session.

The Helpdesk may also be reached at 765-285-1517.

X. Requests for Disability Accommodations
If a student has or may have a need for a disability accommodation related to COVID-19, the student should contact the Office of Disability Services at dsd@bsu.edu or 765-285-5293.

XI. Questions or Concerns
If a student has questions or concerns regarding safety on campus in light of the pandemic or this plan, the student should contact the Office of Student Affairs at studentaffrs@bsu.edu or 765-285-3734.