

Covid Policies and Best Practices

Fall 2020

Department of Physics and Astronomy
8-17-2020

Data about covid monitoring and room closures on campus are posted at <https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/guides/data-monitoring-and-contingency-options>

To keep all students, post-doctoral researchers, staff (including non-departmental staff, such as custodians and facilities service employees) and faculty safe and healthy, we have enacted a community of practice for the physics department and all of its activities including classroom teaching, research, departmental meetings, and student organizations such as SPS and GPS. Our intention is to follow best practices and use university guidelines.

Key Principles

- Individuals differ in the risk COVID-19 poses to them and to others in their household
- Individuals differ in their tolerance of this risk
- Individuals with the greatest tolerance of risk should not impose their standards on others
- Individuals do not have to document or justify their own assessment of risk (i.e. medical conditions) to others to experience conditions that make them feel secure

University Policy

Individuals must comply with all University regulations, including daily [self-assessment and reporting](#) before going on campus and following guidelines for self-quarantine when required. See the UTK return to work plan: <https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/guides/return-to-work>

Self-isolation

- In the event of exposure to COVID-19, Physics community members must self-isolate.
- Those who are self-isolating will complete the [reporting form](#), as required by UTK.

Mask Protocol

- The chance of an infected person passing on the disease is *substantially* lowered by wearing a mask (those with exhaust vents lose this capability)

- The chance of an uninfected person getting the disease is *somewhat* lowered by wearing a mask
- Thus, choosing not to wear an effective mask is not so much assuming a risk to oneself as imposing a risk on another without their consent.
- University policy requires that a mask be worn in any spaces with other individuals: in a classroom, in a lab, in a shared office, in a hallway or stairwell, or restrooms, as well as outside of buildings (UTK policy: Face coverings will be required both indoors and outside except within private spaces and controlled environments. [Fall semester overview: What students can expect on campus / Guides / COVID-19 Information](#)).
- Masks will be provided by the University and physics department to prevent a financial burden on individuals (contact the Physics front-office staff if you need a mask)
- Masks must be worn properly: they should cover the mouth and nose. With a proper mask, it should be impossible to blow out a birthday candle: no one way valves, no big gaps on the side, no exposed nose.
- If an individual appears in a group setting, such as a classroom, without a mask, they may be reminded to put a mask on, asked to leave the room if they do not comply, and/or reported to the [Provost Office](#) or the [Dean of Students](#). Instructors must dismiss a class session entirely if they believe this is a way to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Please also report unsafe situations to the departmental leadership team, Marianne Breinig, Christine Cheney, Kate Jones and/or Hanno Weitering, or email us at physics@utk.edu.

Offices

- Even for faculty members, staff, post doctoral students, grad students, and undergraduate students who have offices or work spaces that are not shared with others, the safest place to work is still your home. You do not need to come to campus if you can work well from home. If you have a private office, you may work without a mask if you are alone and behind a closed door. It will be expected that you will answer the door to the office wearing a mask if someone knocks.
- Graduate students who work in communal offices should practice social distancing (spatial and/or temporal) when possible. The GTA offices now have limited seating capacity and desk spaces are no longer assigned to specific individuals. Individual belongings have been put in boxes and are stored in the student offices. GTAs will still be required use their originally assigned communal office space, but can use 512 Nielsen in case all available desks are occupied. A similar arrangement applies to most GRA offices, but please consult your faculty advisor.
- Undergraduate students can make use of Rooms 201, 208, and 307 to study and/or follow online lectures. Please use headphones if you are in an online session.
- In-person interactions with the office staff in the physics departmental office continue to be restricted. Only two people will be allowed to step into the front office at any given time. Please wait behind the 'barn door' until you are called in, and make sure you stay

apart by at least 6 feet. There can be no more than one person at a time in the mail room.

- Staff are happy to meet via Zoom, talk on the phone or conduct business via email. In-person meetings should only be scheduled when absolutely necessary. Please contact Physics department staff via email if you need their assistance to set up an appointment.

Classes

- A large number of our courses this fall and likely into spring will be conducted online. Those courses that are meeting in person will do so with fewer students meeting at any given time, and will require that all persons wear well-fitted, protective masks, regardless of ability to social distance.
- Please check the new timetable [here](#). The column on the far right lists the back-up instructors for your course in case you become sick and/or cannot teach.
- For instructions on how to connect Zoom with the Cynap system, please visit <http://classrooms.utk.edu>, and watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzwNyoEPBAw&feature=youtu.be>.
- Face shields are available in the front office. Please note that wearing face shields does not eliminate the requirement that face masks be worn at all times (except when you are alone in the office).
- Cleaning supplies will be made available to disinfect all surfaces (note: the primary mode of viral transmission is through airborne droplets).
- Six or more feet of social distancing space is expected at all times.
- It is likely that many students will have to quarantine over the course of the semester, generally for two weeks at time. Instructors will work with students to accommodate those in quarantine so their learning is not impeded.
- Some students may wish to learn remotely throughout the semester. They should communicate this with each of their instructors ahead of time; if such an arrangement is impossible (due to the nature of some courses) the student should make arrangements to take another class (student should consult their academic advisor for guidance). We ask that faculty record their lectures, even those who teach their courses in F2F modality, so that students can always view those lectures.
- Each syllabus should contain language relating to COVID health and safety procedures, as provided in this link: <https://provost.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/06/Syllabus-language-masks-and-social-distancing.pdf>
- A syllabus template and other helpful information about writing syllabi can be found here: <https://teaching.utk.edu/the-syllabus/>

Research

- To minimize transmission risks, each group should seriously consider the need for on-campus research and office time. Each lab group should prepare a written plan detailing any work that requires in-person, on-campus effort (see point about safety plans below).
- Research that requires lab presence will be undertaken in the safest manner possible, and best practices may include use of a sign-up calendar to ensure as few people as possible are in a lab at any given time (following all other safety and hazardous procedure requirements, as detailed in individual labs' safety plans), enacting work shifts, reducing community space, and other means to reduce contact. Which protocols are appropriate should be included as part of the written plan.
- Before any new work is done in a physics lab, a full [laboratory health safety plan](#) must be in place and approved in order to conduct lab work. These plans should be [updated](#) when a) persons are added to the group of individuals working in a lab; b) there are any changes or additions to experimental work that affect health safety plans; or c) there are changes that would lead to persons working alone.
- For the latest updates from ORE, see <https://research.utk.edu/tag/vcr-update/>. Also visit <https://research.utk.edu/covid-19-research-faq/>

Travel

- Social distancing is not possible in a vehicle, even a large university van. Air flow, even with windows open, is not sufficient.
- Travel within the state and outside the state will follow UT policies. Note, however, the unpredictable nature of travel restrictions, both through reaction to disease spread and new border policies of various states and nations. Please be mindful of self-isolation restrictions that may apply for up to 2 weeks upon either arrival at or return from your destination. UT may ban university-related travel to some locations but personal travel is allowed, but quarantine requirements may hold for both.

Meetings

- Group meetings, such as departmental seminars, committee meetings, lab group meetings, and other discussion groups will take place remotely on Zoom or other platforms for the foreseeable future. Exceptions will be allowed for small group meetings if adequate space is available; please check with the front office.
- Student office hours will be held online.
- Individuals needing computing support (home computers or internet access) should go to OIT: <https://forms.utk.edu/tech-request/> to request devices, <https://oit.utk.edu/remote-it/> for info on working remotely, <https://help.utk.edu/footprints/contact/> for other help. For other support (e.g. captioning) individuals should contact the appropriate OED office <https://oed.utk.edu/ada/>

Common spaces

- Room 201 Nielsen (Space Bar) will remain open, albeit with reduced seating capacity. The kitchenette will remain locked.
- High-touch areas such as microwave buttons and refrigerator handles should be cleaned and sterilized before and after use by the user.
- Restrooms are also communal spaces and therefore all door, faucet, and toilet handles should be disinfected by the user using provided materials.
- Please follow the safety signage on doors, walls and floors. You can see some examples on our [facebook page](#).

Other policies

- Within the department, limited progress on graduate students' dissertation or faculty research (from March 2020 until the pandemic's impairment of research ceases) will not be penalized (through graduate student progress reports, faculty tenure or promotion decisions, annual reviews or similar metrics). Graduate students having incurred a substantial delay with their master's or doctoral research, should discuss their concerns and options with their advisor and committee. It is recommended that all students meet with their advisor and committee (if applicable) at least once this fall.
- Pre-tenure faculty have been encouraged to apply for the extension of the pre-tenure period offered by UTK (deadline to apply 31 Dec 2020). College of Arts and Sciences Guidelines: <https://artsci.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Extension-to-Probationary-Period.pdf> and request form: <https://artsci.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CAS-Covid-19-Tenure-Clock-Extension-Request-Form.pdf>
- Annual faculty reviews won't contain a written narrative this fall, except for pre-tenured faculty and faculty who fall short of expectations in one the evaluation categories. If you do not fall into these categories but would like to receive a narrative nonetheless, you may request so in writing. Also, we will not be using the spring 2020 teaching evaluations unless you specifically request this in writing.

This is a living document that will be updated as new information becomes available.