

COVID-19: Return to Campus

Over the past year, our faculty and staff have demonstrated their commitment to our students and our university. Together, we changed course delivery methods to meet the needs of students learning in many different spaces and places. We launched large-scale community testing and vaccine programs. We adapted research methods and the ways in which we provide programming to our constituents. We adjusted how we served meals, moved resources online, and shifted student activities to a virtual environment. Throughout all of this, our staff and faculty have remained dedicated to keeping our campus and offices across the state clean, safe, and operating smoothly, and to providing the very best student experiences. We could not have made this semester a success without your dedication, compassion, and creativity. Thanks to your hard work, we are now looking to the future.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, including the UT Institute of Agriculture and the UT Space Institute, will resume full operations in Fall 2021. This means that members of the university community should expect to see all facilities open and staffed, classes being taught in person, full residence halls, and our vibrant campus fully open and buzzing again! Offices in Knoxville and across the state (including UTIA and UTSI) will be fully open and available to faculty, staff, students and constituents.

The past year has been a grand experiment in terms of what was possible, and we should be proud of the work we have accomplished. We must now take what we've learned and use it to become an even better place to live, learn and work. To prepare for the resumption of full operations in the fall, employees will return to their university workplace on June 1, 2021 under the following guidelines:

Safety and Wellness Measures

As has been the case since last spring, we will continue to take appropriate health precautions, considering the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and Tennessee Department of Health. For our planned June 1 return, all spring semester practices will continue until further notice. This includes the use of masks and social distancing where necessary.

Members of the UT community are encouraged to continue those practices that are broadly supportive of public health: handwashing, hand sanitizer, remaining home when ill, and self-monitoring symptoms. Hand sanitizing stations will remain across campus. The Daily Health Self Screening app may be used as a tool but will no longer be required as of June 1, unless an employee is symptomatic and needs to complete a Self Isolation Form. Similarly, visitors will no longer be required to complete a self-assessment form, but should not enter university locations if they are symptomatic.

Vaccines

UT employees are strongly encouraged to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as soon possible by utilizing the [Vaccine Finder](#). Though the University of Tennessee is not requiring proof of vaccine, adherence to appropriate health and safety guidance and widespread vaccination is

our best hope of controlling the pandemic and further loss of lives. However, choosing not to be vaccinated will not exempt any employee from working in their physical office location.

Some members of our community will not be able to get vaccinated. Still others will simply choose not to do so. Just as supervisors should not ask employees about their vaccine status, neither should faculty ask students. Each individual must take the proper steps to protect themselves, regardless of what others may choose to do.

Staffing

Over the past year, we've learned a great deal about productivity, engagement and resiliency. The Chancellor has asked each unit head to take that information and assess the best way for their unit to operate over the long term. Decisions about alternative work solutions, including remote work, should be based on what is best for ensuring student success, delivering high-quality student and employee services, using campus space, and maximizing employee efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement.

Changes to a unit's pre-pandemic operations or staffing must be approved in writing by the appropriate dean or vice chancellor in writing by May 10. Plans must articulate how proposed changes will better support internal business practices or address operational needs. If there are roles which might improve services by utilizing alternate work scheduling, consider some of the options listed in HR0480: flexible schedules, flex year, job sharing, and/or telecommuting. As you plan, consult with peers who might provide similar services. Collaborate and be creative. Think and talk about return to campus staffing plans with some degree of flexibility; we will learn more as the fall unfolds and may modify some arrangements to better suit the circumstances.

In cases where alternative work schedules are approved, Human Resources will assist in formally documenting those arrangements (required by HR0480) and providing additional educational support. Contact UTK HR at hr@utk.edu or UTIA HR at utiahr@tennessee.edu when you are ready to put in place any long-term full or part-time alternate work agreement that has been approved by the dean or vice chancellor. Additional guidance for those supervising roles with a remote component can be found here: <https://hr.utk.edu/resources-for-leaders/>. Additional guidance for employees completing some component of remote work can be found here: <https://hr.utk.edu/resources-for-employees/>.

Annual and sick leave use will return to pre-pandemic procedures as of June 1, 2020. Remote work should not be used as an alternative to utilizing these types of accrued leave.

All areas should maintain their Go Remote plan in case of emergency.

Phased Return

You may want to consider phasing staff toward their permanent work arrangement beginning at least a month before the Return to Campus date. This gives time for various transition activities to occur, both for our staff members and their families. Flexibility and support will be critical during this time period.

If conditions during the summer change significantly or there is a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, UT will provide further guidance on measures to be taken regarding return to campus workspaces.

Accommodations

Requests for accommodations by staff will be handled through prepandemic procedures. Employees who wish to request a work-related accommodation related to a disability and the June 1 Return to Work date should contact the Office of Equity and Diversity (oad@utk.edu) or by phone at 974-2498. Please contact OED by May 1, 2021 if possible to request a work-related accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Emergency paid leave benefits (UAC) for COVID-related absences will expire on June 30, 2021.

Considerations for Non-Exempt Staff

Given the flexibility of the past year, many employees have been engaged in work activities outside the typical 8-5 workday. Please remember to set appropriate boundaries for the time they are engaged in work activities. Non-exempt employees who are engaged in work activities outside of their normal work hours may become eligible for overtime if they perform work activities for more than 40 hours in the work week. This includes responding to work-related calls and/or e-mails.

Out of state remote workers

UT employees residing and working outside of Tennessee should consult a tax professional regarding taxation issues.

Travel

All members of the UT community are able to travel internationally; however, they must follow the exception process currently in place. If you are traveling to a country that is listed by the State Department or the CDC as a level 3 or 4 country please complete the form found at this link: <https://cge.utk.edu/travel/international-travel-warning-petition-for-faculty-and-staff/>

1. Travelers must check the country guidelines for entry and they must follow testing guidelines for their return to the U.S.
2. The Center for Global Engagement encourages all travelers to be fully vaccinated before traveling. Please be sure to register all international travel prior to departure. That can be done at this link: [Faculty and Staff International Travel Registration](#). Please contact CGE for new information regarding travel insurance and 24/7 travel assistance. This is new coverage that will be provided to all business travelers. We want to be sure you have the relevant insurance cards and access phone numbers. For more information please contact Peggy Myers at pmyers1@utk.edu.

Public Spaces/Dining

Though UTK will continue to evaluate public health metrics and adjust as needed, dining facilities will be fully open beginning fall semester. For the summer, as has been our usual practice, we will have selected national brand locations open, but all residential dining units will be closed.

Restrictions related to shared kitchens and lobby spaces will remain in effect for the June 1 return and re-evaluated for the fall semester based on CDC and Tennessee Department of Health recommendations.

Support

A number of offices are available to assist with Return to Campus questions, instructional assistance and/or educational supports:

- Human Resources (<https://hr.utk.edu/>) or hr@utk.edu
- UTIA Human Resources utiahr@tennessee.edu
- Office of the Provost (<https://provost.utk.edu/>)
- Teaching & Learning Innovation (<https://teaching.utk.edu/>)

Remember resources and supports such as the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) at 855-437-3486, here4tn.com, and the [865-946-CARE \(2273\)](tel:865-946-2273) hotline for distressed faculty and staff. Supervisors or departmental leadership should be consulted with health/safety concerns.