



How to Return to Work Safely

A FACULTY AND STAFF GUIDE FOR RETURNING TO ON-SITE WORK OPERATIONS

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OVERVIEW

Western Carolina University is facilitating a gradual return of faculty and staff to on-site work. The university will endeavor to protect the health of faculty, staff, and students, help ensure the well-being of the campus community, and carefully and deliberately prepare for fall semester.

Every effort has been made to ensure updated information to the greatest extent possible as of the date of issuance; however, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop, please be advised that this guidance is subject to change pursuant to newly issued or revised federal, state, or University of North Carolina System guidance.

The guidance provided is a collective responsibility of the entire university community. All faculty and staff are expected to comply with the procedures, protocols, and requirements outlined in this document, as well as any guidance they receive from their supervisors.

Additional information is available on the [Employee Resources](#) page in the myWCU portal. Questions regarding this document or information on the resources page may be directed to the Office of Human Resources and Payroll at 828 227-7218 or humanresources@email.wcu.edu.

Updated May 11, 2020

Phased Return of Employees

Western Carolina University is gradually, and over time, phasing in the return of faculty and staff consistent with the guidance associated with the State of North Carolina's [three-phased re-opening guidelines](#) based on guidance from local, state, and federal public health authorities such as [North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services](#) and the [National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), as well as applicable orders and regulations from the governor and relevant federal agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The university continues to assess expanded staffing based on mission-critical operations, ability to control and manage specific work environments, and necessity to access on-site resources. Faculty and staff will be informed by their respective division head, dean, or department head when to return to work on-site. No unit or department should increase staffing levels beyond current needs to support critical on-site operations without approval from your division head, dean, or department head. Once decisions to expand on-site staffing in certain areas have been made, faculty and staff should follow the policies and protocols detailed in this guide for returning to work on campus.

The timing and specifics of each phase of expanded on-site work are highly contingent on the progression of COVID-19 within North Carolina and WCU's immediate surrounding area, as well as continued local, state, and federal public health guidance. As with all planning at this time, you are encouraged to remain adaptable to changing conditions with respect to public health guidance. Please remain in contact with your supervisor for instructions related to the specifics of your work assignment.



Ways that Units and Supervisors Can Help Limit COVID-19 Transmission

Units and supervisors should keep the following information in mind when considering options to maintain social distancing measures and reduce population density within buildings and work spaces.

Remote Work: Those who can work remotely to fulfill some or all of their work responsibilities may be permitted to do so. These arrangements, which should be approved by the immediate supervisor and reported to the appropriate division head, dean, department head, and Human Resources, can be done on a full or partial day/week schedule as appropriate.

Alternating Schedules: In order to limit the number of individuals and interactions among those on campus, departments may schedule partial staffing on alternating days. Such schedules will help enable social distancing, especially in areas with large common workspaces.

Staggered Reporting/Departing: The beginning and end of the workday typically bring many people together at common entry/exit points of buildings. Staggering reporting and departure times will reduce traffic in common areas to meet social distancing protocols. (See Enter/Exit Controls for further details).

In-Person Public Visits /Meetings: Meetings with small groups can and should continue to occur in conference rooms or individual offices as long as appropriate social distancing can be achieved. The number of individuals attending in-person meetings will be determined by the size of the space and the ability to maintain appropriate social distancing. Face coverings should be worn during these meetings. If social distancing cannot be achieved, then it is acceptable to shift to Zoom/Teams meetings for all or selected participants.

Visitors: Limit non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations, especially with individuals who are not from the local geographic area.

Group Work Space/Community Facing Work Space: If work spaces need to be appropriately marked to encourage good personal hygiene practices, units and supervisors should contact Facilities Management to mark the space. This includes floor tape indicating 6 feet of distance, rearranging furniture, and installing signs indicating traffic flow.

Cleaning/Disinfection: Facilities Management has implemented new cleaning protocols to include the cleaning of common and high traffic areas to meet CDC sanitation guidelines for disinfection. In accordance with these guidelines, every room on campus has been inventoried and classified by type to determine sanitization needs and the methods necessary to meet these requirements ([Learn more about cleaning protocols](#)) Hand-sanitizer stations will also be maintained at major building entrances, elevator stops, and high-traffic areas.

Building occupants should wipe down commonly used surfaces before and after use with products that meet the Environmental Protection Agency's criteria for use against COVID-19 and are appropriate for the surface. This includes any shared-space location or equipment (e.g. copiers, printers, computers, A/V and other electrical equipment, coffee makers, desks and tables, light switches, door knobs, etc.). Work units may request sanitizing wipes through their respective unit/department head or dean to Facilities Management. These requests will be accommodated pending available supplies.

Travel: Any travel to off-site meetings and between university worksites requires unit or supervisor approval. When possible, two employees should not share the same university vehicle. Travel for work outside of the U.S. requires pre-approval by the appropriate division head. Travel for work within the continental U.S. requires pre-approval as required by the travel policy.

While you may be in a position to make individual choices on personal protective measures while in the workplace, please consider that you are a valued part of a university community and health is everyone's responsibility.



Ways that Faculty and Staff Can Limit COVID-19 Transmission

“Know Your W’s”

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) encourages all state agencies and UNC System institutions to promote that their employees follow DHHS’s [Know Your W’s](#) guidance:

Wear a cloth face covering.

Wait 6 feet apart. Avoid close contact.

Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer.



Hand sanitizer can be used in addition to hand-washing, but is not a substitute for proper hand-washing.

Monitor Symptoms and Stay Home if You Have Symptoms

Faculty and staff who have been instructed to return to the workplace should conduct symptom monitoring every day before reporting to work.

Do NOT report to on-site work if you have any of the following symptoms:

Cough

Shortness of breath
or difficulty breathing

Fever

Chills

Muscle pain

New loss of taste or smell

Sore throat (secondary
symptom)

Congestion or runny nose

Nausea or vomiting

Diarrhea



You should be free of ANY symptoms potentially related to COVID-19 or have had an evaluation and clearance by a licensed health care provider to be eligible to report to on-site work.

If you have any symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19, please notify your supervisor and self-isolate ([see COVID-19 Diagnosis/Symptoms Protocols for Employees and Supervisors](#)) until symptoms have resolved and/or you have been cleared by a health care professional.

Faculty or staff who meet high risk criteria (or have a household member who meets these criteria) and for which face-to-face instruction or onsite work could place them further at risk may request assistance through the University’s formal assistance request process ([COVID-19 Assistance Request Form](#)). Questions regarding this process may be directed to Matt Brown (mbrown@email.wcu.edu or 227-3139) or Trisha Ray (trisharay@email.wcu.edu or 227-2522).



Good Personal Hygiene Practices

Good personal hygiene practices, including face coverings, physical distance protocols, and hand-washing, among other practices, protect both you and those around you. Many people who contract COVID-19 don't show symptoms at first, and some who contract the virus never develop symptoms — but asymptomatic people can still transmit COVID-19 to others. That means it's possible for someone to have COVID-19 and give it to other people without even knowing it. Good personal hygiene practices reduce the likelihood of that happening.

Face Coverings: Faculty and staff are expected to wear face coverings at all times that cover the mouth and nose when on campus.

Face coverings are **REQUIRED** in the following settings:

- For any place outside the home (including the workplace), face coverings must be worn indoors at all times if anyone else in that space is not a member of the same household.
- For faculty and staff in the workplace, face coverings must be worn indoors at all times unless you are alone in a fully enclosed workspace, such as an office with the door closed, and have no expectation of interacting with another person in that space.
- Face coverings must be worn outdoors if it is not possible to consistently be physically distant by more than six feet from non-household members.

While the university may supply PPE upon request or due to the nature of your position and/or applicable regulatory requirement(s), you may supply your own face covering. If you do need to request a face covering, please submit that request to your supervisor who will work with their superiors to determine availability and need.

Social Distancing: Keeping space between you and others is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to the COVID-19 virus and slowing its spread. Since people can spread the virus before they know they are sick, it is important to stay away from others when possible, even if you have no symptoms. Social distancing is important for everyone, especially to those who are at higher risk of getting very sick. Employees must allow these social distancing practices:

- Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people at all times
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings
- Minimize opportunities for close contact by limiting sustained exposure (15 minutes or more) or ensuring sufficient social distancing



Hand-washing and Hand sanitizer: Faculty and staff are expected to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or regularly use hand sanitizer that contains 60% alcohol. You are expected to wash your hands or apply hand sanitizer at the beginning of your shift; after you cough or sneeze; prior to and after eating; and after any use of a restroom facility.

Personal Protective Equipment: Personal protective equipment such as gloves, goggles/face shields, N95 masks, etc., shall be provided to employees based on position and federal, state, or local safety regulations. Please remember that PPE does not confer immunity. Any germs may live on the PPE and be transmitted to you, your coworkers, and/or your family and friends.

Coughing/Sneezing Hygiene: If you are in a private setting and do not have on your face covering, remember to always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or use the inside of your elbow. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Cleaning/Disinfection: Employees are expected to use available supplies to clean and disinfect the following: 1) Their work area (as defined by the supervisor) at the start and end of each work day; 2) Their work vehicle at the start and end of each shift (or before and after each use if the vehicle is shared); 3) Tools/equipment at the start and end of each shift (or after each use if the items are shared).

SIX STEPS to a Healthy Community

Western Carolina University is a community where individuals care about their co-workers, our students, and visitors to our campus. If we all adhere to a set of common standards, we will help reduce the potential transmission of the COVID-19 virus. So, remember and encourage others to follow these six steps:

1. If you feel sick, stay home
2. Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) away from others at all times
3. Wear a face covering at all times unless you are alone in your office or personal space.
4. Wash your hands often (or use hand sanitizer)
5. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow
6. Disinfect surfaces often, especially shared items and touch points

Gatherings in the Work Place

Work Place Gathering Points

Public Transportation/CatTran: Please wear a face covering when you enter and ride in university-provided public transportation. In addition, please space yourself in a way that furthers good social distancing protocols.

Elevators: Practice social distancing, including when entering and exiting elevators. Face coverings are required while riding in an elevator. Observe all signage, and avoid touching the buttons with your exposed hand/fingers, if possible. If an elevator must be shared, passengers should stand as far away as possible from each other. Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers upon departing the elevator.

Meetings: Meetings with small groups can and should continue to occur in conference rooms or individual offices as long as appropriate social distancing can be achieved. The number of individuals attending in-person meetings will be determined by the size of the space and the ability to maintain appropriate social distancing. Face coverings should be worn during these meetings. If social distancing cannot be achieved, then it is acceptable to shift to Zoom/Teams meetings for all or selected participants. Good personal hygiene practices should be applied when utilizing any meeting room.

Conference/Meeting Rooms: Conferences should be conducted pursuant to federal, state, and local orders and should have the approval of the appropriate vice chancellor prior to their start.

Meals: Before and after eating, you should wash your hands thoroughly to reduce the potential transmission of the virus. Always practice good social distancing protocols.



Enter/Exit Control

Entry to buildings may be regulated and monitored. When entering/exiting buildings, appropriate social distancing should be maintained, and you should not hold or prop open exterior doors for any other person. It is possible that some buildings may be subject to more rigorous access control at this time. Departments and building coordinators should work with Facilities Management to identify usable building access points and coordinate arrival and departure times of staff to reduce congestion during typical “rush hours” of the business day. Staff arrival and departures should be scheduled in 30-minute increments to reduce personal interactions at building access points, hallways, stairs/elevators, etc.

Once you have been instructed to return to the workplace, you should report to work or depart work through the designated building access and at the designated time to limit the number of people entering and exiting buildings at any one time.

Signage and Posters

Building occupants are expected to follow signage on traffic flow through building entrances, exits, elevator usage, and similar common use areas.



Mental and Emotional Well-being

Managing COVID-19 and adapting to significant changes in the work environment can be a stressful experience for everyone and may evoke emotions that are unfamiliar or difficult to work through. Each employee will handle the transition back to the worksite differently. The university is committed to supporting your overall health and well-being during this challenging time. For assistance with any mental or emotional health issues, please remember that the Employee Assistance Program is available.

Employee Assistance Program: The ComPsych Employee Assistance Program is available for all employees and their families. Telephonic or video counseling is available, and you can access this service using most smartphones, tablets, and computers with a camera. You may contact EAP by calling 855.259.0382 or visiting the [guidanceresources.com](https://www.guidanceresources.com) website and using the web ID: “WCUEAP”.



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