

From: Dalhousie University Announcements <DAL-ANNOUNCEMENT@LISTS.DAL.CA> **On Behalf Of** Dalhousie Notice
Sent: August 13, 2021 3:03 PM
To: DAL-ANNOUNCEMENT@LISTS.DAL.CA
Subject: Updated safety guidance for fall 2021 (including updated mask guidance)

MEMORANDUM

To: Dalhousie faculty and staff

From: Frank Harvey, Provost and Vice-President Academic
Jasmine Walsh, Assistant Vice-President, Human Resources

Date: Friday, August 13, 2021

Re: Updated safety guidance for fall 2021 (including updated mask guidance)

This week, Nova Scotia Public Health (NSPH) approved [a revised postsecondary framework for the fall](#) [PDF - login required], affirming the layers-of-protection approach Dalhousie has taken to safety planning. With the framework approved, we are now making Dalhousie's full return-to-campus guidance document, based on the framework, available to our university community. [Moving Forward: Dalhousie University Fall Return Guidance can be downloaded here](#) [PDF - login required].

We have also updated [our safety overview on COVID-19 Information and Updates website](#), including [more detailed FAQs](#) of some of the most common questions we've been receiving.

We strongly encourage all academic and unit leaders, faculty and staff to review the updated guidance and safety overview in detail — it is the best and most reliable source of information to address questions you may have or are receiving. If you have questions you don't see answered, we encourage you to share those with your dean, department head, director or supervisor. We are fielding those questions from leaders regularly and will update our guidance and FAQs frequently going forward.

In this memo, you'll find notes and updates on select topics, including:

- COVID outlook and our return to campus
- Updated mask guidance – **mask use will continue through September**
- Vaccination – we continue to strongly recommend but not require vaccination
- Ventilation – review our HVAC strategy
- Living with COVID – including how to report a case in the fall
- Travel – employees may now resume work-related travel

COVID outlook and our return to campus

NSPH's approval of the revised postsecondary framework confirms that **restrictions such as distancing, caps on class sizes, etc. will not be required for university operations this fall.**

This reflects the positive indicators we see in Nova Scotia. COVID cases have declined significantly, with no community spread at present and border measures helping contain travel cases. The province's vaccination

rollout continues steadily and successfully, with over two-thirds of the total population fully vaccinated. And the effectiveness of COVID vaccines is holding strong even against emerging variants: only 0.8% of the 4,200+ cases in the province since March have been in fully vaccinated individuals.

Yet, despite all this, uncertainties remain, and we appreciate this is still an anxious time for many. It remains our assumption, based on conversations with government and NSPH officials, that Nova Scotia will enter the fifth and final phase of our re-opening plan before the start of classes, but exactly when is still uncertain. Details of how broader public health restrictions will be lifted at that point have to-date been very limited — and will likely remain so until after the current provincial election. (The lack of specifics on public school safety is no doubt an extra stressor for many parents in our community.) And as jurisdictions across North America open and lift restrictions — most doing so at notably lower thresholds than Nova Scotia — cases have increased, particularly among the unvaccinated and driven by the more infectious Delta variant.

Dalhousie is well-positioned to navigate this uncertainty. By building a safety plan around multiple layers of protection, we have the ability to add, remove or modify layers as needed — as we are doing with our mask guidance (see below). Our plan also includes measures that have worked well through the pandemic, and will continue even as restrictions lift: improving ventilation, continuing a high standard of space cleaning, strongly encouraging and supporting mask use, etc. And the approval of the postsecondary framework affirms our direction to expect fewer formal Public Health restrictions as we begin the fall term, as **the guidance of the framework has been approved and is not contingent on the province entering its final phase of re-opening.**

We understand the lingering frustrations tied to ongoing uncertainty this close to the start of classes, especially after having spent an extraordinary year-and-a-half living and working through the pandemic. We also appreciate the fact that there are varying comfort and risk tolerance levels across our Dal community and province. At the same time, Nova Scotia has the highest rates of full vaccination of any province in Canada and has set an even higher standard for lowering restrictions (a requirement of 75% fully vaccinated), which will help to limit the risk of widespread community outbreaks as the province re-opens. We can take pride in the way Dalhousie's on-campus activities have been conducted during the pandemic, with faculty, staff and students working together with an extremely high standard of safety and support — with no COVID outbreaks.

These factors make Dalhousie uniquely well-positioned and prepared to re-open this fall to students, faculty and staff, guided by a robust and adaptable safety plan.

Updated mask guidance – mask use continuing through September

We will be asking everyone to continue wearing non-medical masks in common spaces indoors (including classrooms) for the month of September. This is a shift from our original assumption for September and is a transitional measure in consideration of the significant influx of people returning to campus in September — students, faculty and staff alike.

Even if Nova Scotia's broader mask mandate is lifted in September, we expect Public Health to continue to strongly recommend masks in shared indoor spaces or for larger gatherings. This past year has shown that masks are one of the simplest, most effective measures to prevent the spread of not only COVID but other airborne illnesses. We also hope that, with many in our community feeling anxious or concerned about returning this September, this direction encourages everyone to treat masking as a way to be respectful of each other and show our shared commitment to one another's health and safety, easing our transition during this crucial return-to-campus period.

You can read a FAQ of what this will mean [here](#). We will be asking everyone to cooperate in following this mask guidance. We will revisit this directive after September 30, although our current plan after September is to align

mask procedures with the latest Public Health guidance. Again, mask use on campus will continue to be strongly encouraged as a measure to help prevent community spread of airborne illnesses.

Vaccination

Students, as well as faculty and staff, are being advised to be fully vaccinated prior to arriving on campus, and we will continue to encourage and promote vaccination through all student-focused communication channels.

- To date, Dalhousie has hosted 29 vaccine clinics through our Halifax Student Health and Wellness centre. Nearly 4,000 vaccinations will have been administered by month's end. Dal also hosted the first vaccine clinic in Nova Scotia for health-care workers starting in late 2020.
- Dalhousie has confirmed details with the Nova Scotia Health Authority to host on-campus vaccination clinics in Halifax this September, with both appointment bookings via the Nova Scotia vaccine appointment portal and drop-in vaccinations for Dalhousie and King's students, faculty and staff. Details will be shared in the coming weeks. Arrangements for Truro are currently being explored as well.
- Full vaccination also continues to be necessary to avoid self-isolation requirements for both domestic travelers from outside Atlantic Canada and international travelers. We expect this requirement to remain in place — at least for international travelers, for the foreseeable future — which provides students travelling to Dalhousie from outside the region (more than half of our student population) with very strong incentives to get vaccinated.

Many have asked why we are not making vaccinations mandatory. Dalhousie's approach to strongly encouraging vaccination for general campus activities is aligned with guidance provided by Dr. Robert Strang and Nova Scotia Public Health which, to date, have advised against mandatory vaccine requirements for universities, businesses or other organizations in the province. This also reflects the approach of the majority of postsecondary institutions in Canada that have carefully considered the many complications (legal, operational and ethical) in enforcing compliance with a "mandatory" policy and requesting the disclosure of personal health information, as well as the ethical and human rights quandaries in allowing social inequities in vaccine access/adoption rates to potentially limit access to education.

Nova Scotia has the highest full vaccination rates of any province in Canada and no current community spread. Of course, the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve. Many provinces are exploring the option of "vaccine passports," and at least one of Nova Scotia's political parties has raised this as an election commitment.

Although our approach to vaccination remains unchanged, we will continue to evaluate our stance in alignment with the Province, our peer institutions and other organizations in Nova Scotia, and with particular consideration towards future health risks driven by emerging variants. Any change to our vaccination policies would not happen overnight — we would need to provide students, faculty and staff with ample notice ahead of such a significant change. But these trends do highlight the crucial importance of getting vaccinated — any faculty or staff member who has yet to be vaccinated, or has not moved up their second shot appointment, should do so as soon as possible. Learn more [here](#).

Ventilation

One important way to lower the risk of infection from COVID and other airborne illnesses is to improve campus ventilation. This has been one of our most important safety priorities over the past year, with significant work undertaken to assess and make improvements where necessary. This includes reviews and/or improvements in

600+ learning spaces, 165+ research and lab spaces, and updated ventilation guidance provided to unit leaders to assist with returns to general office spaces.

You can view [a summary of what has been done in our COVID-19 safety overview](#), and [our full HVAC strategy can now be viewed on the Return to Campus internal website](#) [PDF - login required]

This work has been guided by current engineering best practice, as well as with COVID-19 guidance from specific ventilation and facilities groups such as ASHRAE, APPA, and REHVA and in accordance with current Public Health guidelines. The university is committed to regularly reviewing the most current recommendations from these health and industry experts.

There is no one-size- or one-standard-fits-all approach for ventilation on a university campus such as ours, with our diversity of spaces and significant variation in age, format and capacity of our facilities. We have adopted a comprehensive, space-by-space approach, as described in the HVAC plan. Our Facilities Management and Environmental Health and Safety teams have been conducting individual assessments and walkthroughs with departmental administrators and building managers to assess spaces and ensure ventilation strategies are best applied to ensure higher quality airflow. By providing direct, specific guidance for individual buildings, we can best ensure that our strategies for ventilation are as effective as possible and in compliance with widely accepted health and safety standards. Our community can have significantly greater confidence in the quality of airflow in shared campus spaces. We encourage faculty or staff with specific questions about ventilation in their spaces to speak with their supervisor or department head, who may reach out to your building's operations manager or to Facilities Management for more information.

Living with COVID

Dr. Strang and Nova Scotia Public Health have described the forthcoming final (fifth) phase of re-opening as “living with COVID.” It embraces language that reflects a reality in which COVID will not completely disappear even with high vaccination rates — we will need to continue implementing strong and effective health procedures. For Dalhousie, this means:

- Continued encouragement and availability of asymptomatic testing for students, faculty and staff — including continuing [the on-campus rapid testing program trialed this summer](#).
- Continuing to follow and support any self-isolation and contact tracing requirements from Nova Scotia Public Health, along with communicating any exposure notifications should they occur.
- Robust procedures in residence to ensure student safety, including wastewater testing.
- Cleaning and disinfection continuing at the high standard that existed pre-pandemic, particularly focused on common touch points and spaces, with hand sanitizer readily available.
- Ensuring accommodations are in place to support students, faculty and staff in the event of exposures and/or COVID cases.

While Faculties and departments are encouraged to consider contingencies as appropriate to their own needs, we have no serious indication at this point that a return to lockdown or significant restrictions is something that requires active, significant planning. If circumstances change dramatically and unexpectedly, we will respond by following the best available guidance and direction from Nova Scotia Public Health and by relying on the experiences and lessons learned from adapting our teaching, learning, research and work in general over the past year and a half.

This resumption of relatively “normal” activities this fall helps explain our shift in return-to-campus planning. For much of the past year, Dalhousie’s pandemic response has been supported by a cross-campus Return to Campus

(RTC) committee, chaired by the Provost and Vice-President Academic and informed by input and guidance from leaders and expertise from across our university community. This group worked alongside and in tandem with traditional governance and oversight bodies that continued throughout the pandemic, including Senate, the Environmental Health & Safety Committee, and general university administration.

Last month, as our return-to-campus plans shifted to align with and support Nova Scotia's reopening plan and the expected lifting of major restrictions, the RTC approval process was decommissioned and oversight of approvals, review and procedures for campus returns was returned to individual Faculty and unit leads. We have worked, and will continue to work, to provide guidance to campus leaders with respect to health and safety, HR and academic planning as required.

With respect to any COVID infections that may occur this fall: if you or someone in your classroom or work unit has COVID, the same protocols that have been in place throughout the year will apply in Fall of 2021 and beyond. Faculty and staff cases should be reported through Accessible Employment in HR (Orla McDevitt – accelemp@dal.ca, 902-219-1599), who are the Public Health contacts for employee cases and are able to connect with leaders around contact tracing and to mobilize our colleagues from FM to do a deep cleaning in the area. For students, Student Affairs is the recognized Public Health contacts for students and can mobilize FM for deep cleaning and contact other staff around contact tracing. (Verity Turpin - verity.turpin@dal.ca, 902-430-7153 or Emily Huner - Emily.huner@dal.ca or 902-222-6779).

Travel

University funded travel is authorized to resume, subject to Dalhousie's International Travel Policy and restrictions related to travel advisories issued by the Government of Canada. More information can be found [here](#).

More information

Please visit [the COVID-19 Information and Updates page](#) for links to the latest, most up-to-date information about the fall term and returns to campus.

Thank you, once again, for everyone's incredible hard work, patience and commitment to safety as we continue our work towards returning to campus and starting the fall term.

Sincerely,

Frank Harvey
Provost and Vice-President Academic

Jasmine Walsh
Assistant Vice-President, Human Resources

Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. We are all treaty people.

We acknowledge the histories, contributions, and legacies of the African Nova Scotian people and communities who have been here for over 400 years.