

8/17/2022 [AllUnit]: COVID plans and Preview Week

Dear colleagues,

Two important updates for you as we all prepare for the semester, one on COVID-19, and one on Preview Week.

First, MSP is getting a lot of questions about UMass's COVID-19 public health measures. The administration released its "reopening" plan for the campus today. We wanted to reinforce a few points:

1. We encourage anyone with symptoms (sore throat, headache, fatigue etc.) or exposure to COVID to take advantage of testing at UHS – the cost of these PCR tests will be covered by your insurance and you do not need an appointment to get tested during the week at UHS. Rapid antigen tests also continue to be available (for free) in vending machines on the first floor of the Campus Center.
2. The official campus policy is that "masking is strongly encouraged" particularly in crowded spaces like classrooms. Feel free to reinforce that message among your students and colleagues. Some faculty have requested that their students wear masks in their classroom, and some have provided personal stories about themselves or immunocompromised household members who need to be protected from infection – it is absolutely fine to make that kind of request. Obviously, faculty cannot impose penalties on students who refuse to mask, but almost all students have been respectful and kind when asked to protect others by wearing masks in particular situations.
3. If you have health conditions that put you at risk of severe illness, you have the right to request an accommodation through the Accessible Workplace office. You will need a healthcare provider to attest to your medical situation; fill out an accommodation request form here: <https://www.umass.edu/equalopportunity/accessible-workplace>. Let MSP know if you have any trouble with the accommodations process.
4. We are still meeting with Environmental Health and Safety regularly, together with the other unions. MSP is continuing to follow up about wastewater testing (to identify areas of campus where COVID infections are increasing), adaptive testing, and the need to improve ventilation in many campus buildings. We are also following up about monkeypox surveillance and availability of vaccines. We will keep you posted as we learn more.

On another topic, we have received questions about "preview week" which begins on August 30 at 9:00 am. At that time, your fall Moodle or Blackboard course will become visible to your students – unless you hide it. It is entirely optional to participate in preview week – we know that some instructors have good reasons for not making the full content of their courses visible to students before the start of the semester, and that is fine! Instructions for opting out of preview week are coming soon. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please reach out to the IDEAS team at instruct@umass.edu.

In solidarity,

Eve and Marc