Higher Education

The "Tennessee Pledge" is a plan to help Tennesseans get back to work in a safe environment, restore their livelihoods and reboot our state's economy.

Tennessee **Pledge**

Tennessee Pledge

These guidelines were drafted in conjunction with:

Name	Department/Agency/Company
Randy Boyd	President, University of Tennessee
Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover	Tennessee State University
Dr. Sidney McPhee	President, Middle Tennessee State University
Dr. Brian Noland	President, East Tennessee State University
Dr. Philip Oldham	President, Tennessee Tech University
Dr. Claude Pressnell	President, Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association
Dr. M. David Rudd	President, University of Memphis
Dr. Flora Tydings	Chancellor, Tennessee Board of Regents
Dr. Alisa White	President, Austin Peay State University

Higher Education

For All Colleges and Universities

As both public and private institutions of higher education seek to serve students in the COVID-19 era, an array of measures are available to ensure high quality instruction continues while pursuing the most important goal: the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff.

Ultimately, decisions related to instruction in Fall 2020 are solely the purview of the governing boards and presidents; this document provides a set of safeguarding protocols for colleges and universities based on the current recommendations of the CDC and OSHA. Nothing in this document should be construed to stipulate or require campuses to reopen in the Fall; rather, it is an advisory document for those that do choose to reopen for on-campus instruction.

In all cases, colleges and universities should consult guidance issued by OSHA, the CDC, and the State of Tennessee. Many of the recommendations in this document are based on the report from the American College Health Association *Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era*, as well as the University of Tennessee System's recently released *Best Practices* document and the ERG's previously released *Tennessee Pledge* documents. Additionally, it is imperative to emphasize that these guidelines do not replace or supersede any applicable federal guidance or other regulatory or statutory requirements.

Safeguarding Guidance

In addition to making decisions informed by OSHA and CDC guidelines, the State recommends higher education institutions implement a range of measures to protect students and employees. Tennessee's colleges and universities have already taken extensive measures to do so, and these guidelines serve as a supplement. Institutions are encouraged to implement additional precautions as feasible. These recommendations are subject to change.

I. Faculty, Staff, and Administration Protection

General Considerations

- **Creating policies and protocols to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 on campus:**
    - Policies should be customized to meet the needs and capabilities of each campus, in consultation with local health officials.
    - May include: daily symptom screenings, no-touch temperature checks, and a plan to respond if employees and/or students are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
    - Establishing policies to manage college/university-sponsored travel.
- **Developing checklists to maintain a safe learning environment and distributing them to each faculty member.**
    - Checklists could include, but should not be limited to:
        - Screening students upon arrival to each class period or other in-person meeting using a questionnaire developed in cooperation with local health officials;
        - Notifying administrators as identified in campus COVID-19 plan if a student is exhibiting symptoms or has a confirmed case of COVID-19;
        - Encouraging students to maintain social distancing when entering and exiting the classroom/lab;
        - Monitoring student attendance/absenteeism to aid in contact tracing; and
        - Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects in classroom/lab according to CDC guidelines.
- **Maximizing opportunities for remote working and online classes**.
    - Encourage faculty and staff to work from home when appropriate and engage with students and colleagues via distance-learning or virtual applications (e.g., Zoom).
    - For courses taught on campus, institutions should consider:
        - A hybrid model that allows for online instruction and in-person instruction, allowing for social distancing and other precautions.
        - Staggering schedules with more time between classes to reduce congestion in walkways and buildings.
        - Spreading out classes/sections across days to reduce class size to maintain proper social distancing.
- **Monitoring virus spread in consultation with local health officials and prepare to shift to increased or solely online instruction** as needed due to the potential need to quarantine or shelter at home.

Possible Best Practices

Colleges and universities may consider the following:

- **Offering employees flexible work hours** and staggered shifts to reduce the number of employees on campus at one time;
- **Establishing virtual office hours** for faculty and student advising functions;
- **Encouraging those with severe underlying medical conditions** or over the age of 65 to share any concerns about returning to campus or participating in large gatherings of greater than 10 or other situations of potential exposure, including travel;
  - Institutions should consider making accommodations as applicable by institutional policy.
- **Providing staff and custodial workers** with appropriate PPE and training consistent with their duties;
- **Practicing proper social distancing of at least 6 feet when possible**;
- **Providing hand sanitizer in employee areas, and maintain supply of soap and paper towels in restrooms**;
- **Recommending employees wear face coverings**, and other personal protection items as recommended by the CDC (e.g., gloves if appropriate for the specific task);
- **Increasing hygiene practices** – wash hands more frequently, avoid touching face, practice good respiratory etiquette when coughing or sneezing; and
- **Directing any employee who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms** (i.e., answers "yes" to any of the screening questions or who is running a fever) to leave the premises immediately and seek medical care and/or COVID-19 testing, per Tennessee Department of Health and CDC guidelines. In all situations, institutions should maintain the confidentiality of employee health information.

II. Student Protection

General Considerations

- **Creating policies and protocols to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 on campus:**
  - Policies should be customized to meet the needs and capabilities of each campus, in consultation with local health officials.
  - As with staff and faculty, may include: daily screenings, no-touch temperature checks, and a plan to respond if students are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- **Establishing policies and protocols for on-campus housing** to decrease the risk of student exposure. Policies and protocols may include:
  - Considering alteration of housing policies and occupancy to maximize social distancing whenever possible and requiring face coverings in common areas and when in close proximity to other persons;
  - Frequent reminders on proper personal hygiene practices; increased communications about COVID-19 prevention;
  - Enhancing cleaning in all common areas and high-touch surfaces according to CDC guidelines;
  - Providing training on reducing the spread of COVID-19 for all live-in professionals, residence advisors, etc.;
  - Limiting events and social activities except when proper social distancing can be maintained;
  - Restricting building access to non-residents; and
  - Establishing policies for medically vulnerable students, in compliance with applicable education and civil rights laws (e.g., academic flexibility or other accommodations and precautions).
- **Developing policies, in consultation with local health officials, for isolating and caring for students** who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or have a confirmed case of COVID-19.
  - Policies to consider if a positive case occurs on campus, could include:
    - Alerting local health officials immediately and coordinating response;
    - Consider closing any affected areas of campus for an appropriate amount of time for cleaning and disinfecting;
    - Communicating with students, staff, and faculty, while respecting individual privacy rights; and
    - Contact tracing, including cooperating with public health officials;
  - Positive or symptomatic individuals will need to self-isolate and monitor for worsening conditions.

- Institutions may need to isolate the individual in temporary housing locations, ensuring continuity of meal programs.
- Contact tracing and consider isolating individuals who have had close contact with the ill student.

Possible Best Practices

Colleges and universities may consider the following:

- **Providing hand sanitizer** and ensuring sinks are working properly and are maintained with soap and paper towels;
- **Recommending students wear face coverings**, and other personal protection items as recommended by the CDC;
    - Should institutional policy dictate that students are required to wear face coverings, institutions should consider providing face coverings to students.
- **Encouraging on-campus residents to remain on campus** as much as possible and establishing policies to manage college/university-sponsored travel;
- **Developing policies for international students** that may include flexible course delivery offerings, with consideration for their travel to and from campus;
- **Conducting all counseling and advising sessions virtually**, if possible;
- **Limiting the number of visitors on campus**, including access to higher density areas and residence halls, including guest lecturers, tours, parents, etc.;
    - Consider implementing a face covering policy for guests.
- **Reinforcing social distancing requirements** whenever possible, in all common areas, classrooms, and dining areas.
    - Consider limiting the number of attendees for in-person classes or creating multiple sections/shifts to reduce numbers.
        - Due to the fact CDC guidelines suggest activities like singing or using a projected voice may project respiratory droplets in greater quantity and over greater distance, increasing the risk of COVID-19 transmission:
        - Maintain at least 15 feet of separation—and more if possible— between audience members and performers such as vocalists and singers;
        - Adopt seating and spacing modifications to increase physical distance from a performer;
        - Where necessary, install barriers to minimize travel of aerosolized particles from performers, or implement alternative placement of performers;
        - Maximize physical spacing between performers on-stage.
    - In dining areas, tables should be placed at least six feet apart.

- Consider the use of takeout style dining or other strategies to scale back or adapt dining services.
- **Increasing cleaning protocols for common areas**, high traffic areas, and high touch surfaces according to CDC guidelines.

III. Operational Process Adaptations

General Considerations

- **Working with local health department to develop or update COVID-19 response plan**, including continuity plan in case of campus outbreak.
    - Monitor changes in community spread with local health officials and enact plan accordingly.
    - Develop protocols with local health officials in case of positive COVID-19 tests.
- **Conducting a tabletop exercise with campus and local health leaders** regarding COVID-19 outbreak response.
- **Establishing procedures for caring for students and staff** who arrive sick or become sick on campus; establishing policies for self-isolation of employees and students if they are experiencing symptoms.
- **Requiring employees and students to report any illness (COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, or positive COVID-19 test)** to supervisor or administrator.
    - Communicating to employees and students to stay home when sick, cover coughs and sneezes, frequently wash hands, sanitize high-touch surfaces, wear face coverings, and practice proper social distancing.
    - Developing a plan to monitor and aggregate reported illnesses and/or symptoms while maintaining applicable confidentiality policies.

Possible Best Practices

Colleges and universities may consider the following:

- **Appointing a senior leader on campus to coordinate all COVID-19 related actions;**
- **Considering a phased re-opening of campus**;
    - Options include phased re-opening or term-based cohorts based on classification.
- **Implementing residential housing move-in protocols** with staggered dates and times and limitations on the number of family and friends present and time spent on campus;
- **Shortening the fall term** by the option that best fits the campus structure;
    - Possibilities include eliminating Fall Break and ending the term at the Thanksgiving holiday.
- **Implementing and maintaining social distancing policies**;

- o Consider installing plexiglass or other barriers in workspaces (e.g., library, study areas, computer lab) where people must face each other or are unable to be 6 feet apart.
- o Define and post allowable occupancies in order to control workflow and/or establish maximum attendance.
- **Developing and maintaining a communication plan for faculty, staff, and students** on infection prevention and control measures, as well as any campus updates;
  - o Increasing use of on-campus signage and social media outreach.
  - o Possible signage options could include the following documents to help educate staff and students on COVID-19 best practices:
    - CDC guidance to stop the spread of germs
    - CDC guidance on COVID-19 symptoms
- **Discontinuing the use of drinking fountains**.
- **Limiting elevator capacity** and encourage use of stairs.
- **Controlling congestion on high-traffic walkways** by creating one-way paths, using signage and barriers; establish one-way entrances and exits to buildings and classrooms as possible.
- **Monitoring student absenteeism** to aid in contact tracing.
- **Increasing mental health and student support services** for students and staff.
  - o Ensure regular interrogative communication with students regarding their mental health and reminding them of on campus resources.
- **Developing a strategy for on-campus transit**, including but not limited to maintaining at least 6 feet of social distancing, not sitting or standing within 6 feet of bus driver, wearing a face covering, and routine cleaning and disinfecting.
- **Creating a plan for athletics** in conjunction with respective conferences and governing bodies.
- **Developing protocols for on-campus events** in accordance with state and local guidelines.
  - o Executive orders from the governor and/or local orders in six counties with a locally run county health department (Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Madison, Shelby, and Sullivan) continue to limit group sizes for participation in social and recreational gatherings and require persons or groups of certain sizes to maintain separation from other persons or groups outside their own group.
  - o Institutions should be mindful of applicable orders and ensure that their operations facilitate compliance with them.