

PLAN FOR RETURN TO THE WORK PLACE

at the Perelman School of Medicine

[Effective July 6 to September 6, 2021]



BACKGROUND:

Immediately at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Perelman School of Medicine (PSOM) formed the PSOM Mission Continuity and Pandemic Response (PSOM MCPR) Team to guide first our rapid depopulation of campus; second to develop and implement measures and processes to keep our community safe; and third to support the gradual return to research.

In many respects, we have been preparing for the return to the work place since June 2020, which included completion of Resumption of Research Training for Lab Personnel developed by Environmental Health and Radiation Safety (EHRS); submission of individual lab resumption plans by Principal Investigators (PIs); designation of compliance officers, individuals who are in the lab regularly and can monitor and educate on safety measures; and implementation of these plans for our research personnel who have been coming to campus on a regular basis for almost a year. As the year progressed, we found that our mitigation efforts were very effective, and to date, PSOM has reported zero documented workplace transmissions.

Given our success thus far in plans for continuation of essential on-site work and the phased return to the work place, we will continue to recommend the following guiding principles and allow individual programs and departments to make decisions within this framework as we seek to return to pre-pandemic conditions wherever possible.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Because Penn Medicine has three distinct mission areas – education, research, and clinical care – we propose a plan that provides overarching principles, with safety always as the highest priority. Our plan also allows for individual programs and departments to have the autonomy and flexibility to create plans that work best for them. Indeed, we have been operating in this way for some time, with no pause in patient care and with the majority of our wet-bench programs having already returned to full capacity.

On May 19, the [University communicated updates](#) regarding operations during the summer, and much of the relaxation of restrictions will be effective on June 11, as per [City of Philadelphia guidelines](#). Until June 11, we continue to adhere to universal masking directives, as [communicated by Penn Medicine](#), and social distancing and meeting requirements, as underscored in a [recent communication](#). COVID-19 vaccination is now mandatory for our [health system colleagues](#), and we continue to strongly encourage vaccination for the safety of the entire community.

As we move toward a return to near-normal functions, within limits set by local public health guidelines, the PSOM will continue to focus on the following safety precautions:

- Indoor masking: as [supported by Penn Medicine](#) leadership, indoor masking will continue to be required in all of our facilities, in particular given that at least some work in buildings where patients are also located, regardless of vaccination status. We will continue to monitor updates

for colleges and universities by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH), which, in partnership with the University and the health system, will inform our PSOM guidelines.

- Density and physical distancing: we will follow the directives on density and social distancing for colleges and universities as provided by the PDPH. These directives may require programs and departments to develop work schedules, such as staggered schedules to ensure density requirements are met; guidance is subject to change based on June 11 City of Philadelphia guidelines and as informed by University and the health system guidelines.
- Training: all returning members of the PSOM community will be asked to complete the appropriate COVID Safety training module via Knowledge Link, with compliance tracked by our internal COVID Employee Tracking database.

In addition, as outlined in the [University's Comprehensive Guide on the Return to Campus](#), Penn has provided comprehensive online training, also available via Knowledge Link, for all faculty and staff to complete as part of their preparation for their return to work:

- [Penn Guide to Returning to Campus](#) (Non-Research Work) (Faculty and Staff)
- [Prevention of COVID-19 Transmission in Penn Research Labs](#)

Furthermore, our return-to-the-work-place plan is contingent on the adequate custodial, physical plant staff, security, and resources being in place to support the increased populations of our buildings.

PHASED APPROACH:

Within the framework of our Guiding Principles, we will prioritize the following groups as among the first to return to the work place.

- Faculty / PIs: as indicated in the [April 22 notification](#) from the University on Penn's Plans for the Fall Semester, there is an expectation to return to an in-person teaching and research environment. Therefore, we expect that our faculty and PIs will be among the first to return to campus, so that they can provide in-person instruction and training, as well as ensuring continued safety compliance within the labs.
- Medical Students: Medical students will be expected to attend small-group didactic sessions and exams in the Jordan Medical Education Center (JMEC) as per PDPH guidelines in the Fall of 2021. Clinical students will continue to attend to their clinical responsibilities. Clinical didactics will be held in person in JMEC when social distancing allows and when density requirements are met.
- Graduate Students and Postdocs: similar to our expectations for faculty and PIs, graduate students and postdocs will return to an in-person learning and research environment as necessary to complete their course work and research plans. This change is most applicable to our computational/office-based trainees, as most trainees working at the wet-bench started returning months ago.

- Lab Staff: all lab staff who need to be on campus to conduct work will return to campus. If lab staff who can work remotely prefer to return to campus, they will be permitted to do so in coordination with their supervisor.
- Administrative Managers: we believe it will be essential for managers to be among the first to return to the work place to help establish a careful process for returning staff. This includes ensuring that the correct density recommendations are in place and that the logistics of the office have been considered. Managers will also familiarize themselves with PSOM wellness resources and be able to direct returning staff to these resources if needed.

As we bring the aforementioned groups back on campus, we will adjust as necessary any of our guiding principles and mitigation efforts to ensure the continued safety and well-being of all.

In any given scenario, the School will prioritize our research and education missions and the underlying functional needs therein; that is, those who need to be on campus will need to be on campus, and those who can continue to be productive remotely will have the option to consider a more flexible arrangement during this phased resumption period.

SUPPORT IN PLACE:

As we continue to introduce new functions to the gradual return to the work place, we will continue to provide the following support, which has served our community well:

- The PSOM Mission Continuity and Pandemic Response (PSOM MCPR) Team will continue to meet in some form to respond to any concerns that may arise. This team will also review safeguards in place and adjust accordingly, such as pedestrian flow and security, access points, etc.
- For those fully vaccinated, we support an exemption for testing, thereby rendering participation in PennOpen Pass unnecessary. Therefore, PennOpen Pass will not be a necessary tool enforced at building entrances starting July 6, and we may implement earlier. For those individuals unvaccinated and coming to campus 4 hours or more per week, they will follow University testing guidelines that are in place at that time and we will enforce compliance at the local level (e.g. supervisor, lab, department, etc.)
- We will continue to monitor updates for colleges and universities by the PDPH, which, in partnership with the University and the health system, will allow for the following:
 - review guidance on breakrooms, meeting spaces, and restrooms
 - reopen additional entrances to distribute increased occupant load, use of elevators, etc. in anticipation of 6 July return to campus plan
 - unlock internal controlled access during daytime to ease circulation / access to shared facilities, classrooms, etc.
 - follow Public Safety directives for entry control, with the goal of returning to "normal operations" - of three daytime staffed entrances and controlled access entry at all other locations - as restrictions ease

- We will encourage clearing / cleaning of spaces to create more efficient use of space.
- We will implement a pilot program to evaluate a flexible work arrangement within our administrative teams.

We understand that guidelines through the State, Commonwealth, and City continue to evolve, and we will continue to adapt and adjust as necessary. As noted, we may implement some of these measures prior to July 6 as the City of Philadelphia is expected to further ease restrictions on June 11.

CONSIDERATIONS:

As we work to support the safe return to the work place for our community, there are a few areas of consideration that are noteworthy.

- Philadelphia Department of Public Health guidelines for colleges and universities
- Parking: build in more options to accommodate more drivers and make more lots available for daily parking passes. Extend the campus zone by providing access to Indego stations to parking areas that are farther from campus (like the Penn Innovation Center).
- Transportation including SEPTA, PATCO, NJ Transit – particular attention to concerns about safety, cleanliness, and increasing the frequency of routes and extension of the service day.
- Child and Elder Care – more flexibility needed to accommodate caregivers, especially during the summer when schools are not in session and camps may not be available.
- IT Infrastructure and Wi-Fi: with the quick pivot to remote work, we have now become more technologically-savvy, and therefore will need flexibility in participating in meetings on laptops or other devices outside of one's own office or cubicle, such that strong and reliable wi-fi is necessary and reliance on ethernet connectivity might not be tenable.
We should continue to utilize technology efficiencies that we have learned over the past year. For example, attendance at meetings is facilitated by video conferencing.
- Flexible Work Arrangements: including flexible work location and flexible scheduling
- Prepare for a scaling back of the return to campus, if necessary

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT:

The following resources provide additional support for our community:

- COVID-19 Safety Information: <https://ehrs.upenn.edu/covid-19>
- Guide for Managers: <https://www.hr.upenn.edu/PennHR/wellness-worklife/communicable-disease-health-and-safety/covid-19-guidance-for-managers>
- PENN COVID-19 FAQ: <https://wellness.upenn.edu/coronavirus/>

- Penn's Division of Human Resources Comprehensive Guide: <https://www.hr.upenn.edu/docs/default-source/return-to-campus-covid/faculty-staff-return-to-campus-guide.pdf>
- Penn Human Resources: <https://www.hr.upenn.edu/PennHR/wellness-worklife/communicable-disease-health-and-safety>
- PennMedicineTogether: <https://www.med.upenn.edu/PennMedicineTogether/>
- PSOM Ready: <https://www.med.upenn.edu/psomready/>

Questions or concerns? Please feel free to contact the [PSOM Mission Continuity and Pandemic Response team](#).