

Faculty Guidance on Wearing Face Masks* and Social Distancing while on the UTEP Campus

Introduction.

The severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) causes human infection that can be asymptomatic or symptomatic, producing Coronavirus disease -19 (COVID-19), which can range from mild self-limited illness to a severe and fatal outcome. Although the infection may or may not cause disease, any infected person can transmit the virus to others through droplets and aerosolized virus expelled into the air by coughing and talking. Evidence accumulated during this COVID-19 pandemic indicate that the most effective known basic safety measures for the prevention of virus transmission are wearing a mask, abiding by social distancing rules (by staying at least 6 feet away from each other), and washing your hands frequently (see attached CDC guidelines and infographics for proper mask wearing protocols). The purpose of this document is to inform the UTEP faculty of the recommendations and guidance on best practices to decrease the risk of infection while at our campus. The wearing of masks and social distancing are among the most feasible and effective measures for the prevention of SARS-CoV-2 transmission and, therefore, that are an integral component of the overall strategy to protect and preserve the health of the UTEP campus community. However, everyone must be aware and understand that there are no known measures that can afford complete protection against infection by this virus while you engage in face-to-face social interactions.

Our role as faculty is critical in championing the health, safety, educational and operational plans to keep the UTEP campus community safe at all times. As so, our behavior during this COVID-19 pandemic must serve as a model for others on campus by strictly complying with all safety recommendations and guidance on all campus-related activities (research, advising, and/or service). Such recommendations and guidance are described below and were prepared by UTEP faculty who are experts on the biology and prevention of the transmission of viruses in collaboration with representatives of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, including colleagues from Nursing, Pharmacy, Education, and Liberal Arts. These recommendations and guidance will be in effect until the Office of the President indicates that it is safe to go back to normal campus operations, based on public health guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other relevant federal and state healthcare entities.

The UTEP Department of Environmental Health and Safety will provide all faculty, staff, and students washable cotton cloth face coverings (masks). The UTEP masks must be worn on campus only and either stored after working hours in a zip lock bag at UTEP or taken home in a bag for washing and drying to decontaminate any potential virus for continued use.

Assistance will be provided to all on campus faculty, students and staff on how to best comply with wearing a mask and social distancing. As such, everyone will be required to attend a public health safety behavior practices compliance training module on the prevention of SARS-COV-2 infection. Participants will sign a Behavioral Agreement form indicating their willingness to comply with recommended public health safety practices. On completion of the compliance training modules, faculty, students and staff will be expected to understand and comply with the proper wearing and use of face masks.

The UTEP faculty must be aware that being granted access to campus does not imply being given access to all buildings on campus. Access to specific buildings, laboratories, and other areas around campus may be further restricted at various risk levels associated with this pandemic.

Recommendations and Guidance for UTEP Faculty

1. All UTEP faculty must wear a mask and practice social distancing (i.e., stay 6 feet or more apart from any other individual) at all times while at campus. This includes both while inside any building or facility, as well as in any outdoor area within campus.
2. All faculty must properly wear face masks when engaging with each other, staff, and with students in classrooms, laboratories, and other public spaces.
3. We encourage faculty to wear face masks even while alone in offices with doors closed due to the possibility of the virus being spread from one room to another in the ventilation systems.
4. Elevators and restrooms are high-risk areas as a source of infection by the SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, masks must be worn while inside all on-campus restrooms and elevators. Individuals must not have conversations in restrooms or elevators, even when wearing a mask. Also, everyone must comply with the number of individuals authorized to occupy elevators and restrooms at the same time, which will be posted on all campus restrooms and elevators.
5. The only exception to the requirement to wear a mask at all times is while individuals are at the specific outdoor locations on campus designated as **mask-free zones**. These areas are intended to be used to drink, eat and take a brief break. While at these locations, all individuals must maintain social distancing and refrain from moving tables, seats or other items. Permanency at these areas must be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes.
6. Failure to comply with these recommendations and guidance may result in denial of access to campus, and removal from campus. Repeated violations of these recommendations and guidance could result in the individual being barred from access to campus.
7. Individuals who are barred from access to campus will be required to demonstrate to EH&S that they understand the on-campus safety guidance by passing a verbal/written exam and may be required to show a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result.

Additional information related to safety plans for on-campus classes are available at <https://www.utep.edu/resuming-campus-operations/information-for/faculty.html>

Guidance on the type of masks to be used:

Acceptable masks include cloth face masks and/or surgical masks that cover nose and mouth. N95 masks are approved for use, though their use is prioritized for health care workers; furthermore, N95 masks must be face fitted to be effective and their use requires an evaluation of your health status to determine whether you can accommodate the additional breathing effort associated with using N95 masks.

Not acceptable masks (items that are not authorized for use as masks because they are not effective for preventing the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from an infected person to others) include the following:

- § Face shields
- § Cloth masks with valves
- § Loose fitting bandanas

Guidance on cleaning of cloth face masks: (from CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings.html>)

- o Washing by machine: Face coverings can be washed with regular loads of laundry
- o Washing by hand: A bleach solution can be prepared to wash the face mask
- § Example: 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of room temperature water

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Face masks can be dried using the highest heat setting in the dryer until completely dry; air drying can be implemented if the mask is allowed to lay flat and allowed to dry completely (if possible, the face mask should not be placed in direct sunlight).

Guidance of the proper way to wear masks:

See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ML3n1c0FHDI&t=3s>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

Additional information Relevant to Health and Safety Measures at UTEP

The faculty recommends that UTEP be a designated “mandatory mask wearing” campus with messaging and signage to inform all faculty, students, staff and campus visitors of this universal expectation.

The Faculty recommends the use of campus health and safety ambassadors, made up of staff or volunteers who would wear special colored T-shirts with messages such as – HELPING YOU TO KEEP THE UTEP CAMPUS SAFE. These individuals could be positioned inside and outside buildings on campus to help keep everyone in-compliance and informed of safety measures in place on the UTEP campus.

As an additional source of assistance, the faculty will organize and convene on-line sessions to educate faculty, students and staff regarding the type of mask, proper way to wear and wash masks and the public health and personal benefits of wearing a mask. Faculty and students will receive guidelines for wearing and using masks before classes start and will have access to guidelines and posted signs in classrooms, labs, and other shared use areas.

We anticipate that the majority of UTEP faculty will be teaching courses online to limit the number of people on campus to help prevent the potential transmission of SARS-CoV-2. However, it may not be possible for some faculty to teach completely online and therefore will require that in person activities be presented on campus while there still maybe community spread of SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, in-class group interactions should be short, such as demonstrations or laboratory activities that cannot be accomplished online.

Whenever course activities take place face-to-face in the classroom, instructors and students must wear masks (not face shields), comply with social distancing, and instructors must use their own assigned microphones to facilitate communication, if necessary. The need for individual microphones or any other special equipment should be outlined in your safety work plan and protocols established within your department or programs.

Faculty who need special accommodations should consult with their Chairs and those faculty who have health concerns can communicate with Human Resources and the Equal Opportunity Office to request modifications or adjustments based on their needs or concerns.

Sample Course Syllabus Statement as follows:

The present course has a hybrid component that permits for actual face to face interactions with faculty and other students enrolled in this class. Although this hybrid component of the course is designed in such format, everyone who attends in person activities must wear a face mask at all times while such meeting is taking place, maintain social distance of a minimum of 6 or more feet, and practice proper hygiene practices. Anyone not wearing a mask will be required to leave. As you enter or exit campus, minimize the number of encounters with others to avoid infection by the SARS-CoV-2. Use preventive safety and health measures at all times until informed otherwise by campus officials.

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Any faculty, students, and staff who are infected with SARS-CoV-2 may show symptoms or be asymptomatic. If you or one or more of your household members have fever or chills, a cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion of runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, , and/or tested positive for COVID-19, or if you have been exposed to a sick person outside your home with or without a diagnosis of COVID19, stay home and do not visit the UTEP campus.

After staying home for 14 days and you remain healthy and need to return to campus, you must contact Environmental Health and Safety who will provide guidance that may require you to provide a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result.

The faculty recommend that anyone who is barred from entering campus because of failure to comply with safety guidance must not be permitted to return to campus until the EH&S has granted approval. Approval to re-enter campus will require that the person(s) must demonstrate to EH&S that they understand the on campus safety policies and procedures, which may also require the passing a verbal/written exam and a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test result.

All faculty should work with their Chairs to discuss safety plans for re-entering UTEP campus, classroom, and labs in the fall. Research on best practices for face masks will be available in the Faculty Resources link of the UTEP COVID-19 website. Faculty safety measures for labs are currently available to assist you in creating your safety contingency plan.

All members of the UTEP campus community must be aware and comply with the recommendations and rules while on campus to help protect yourself and others against contracting COVID-19 and to prevent the spread of SARS-COV-2. The repeated failure to comply with recommendations and rules will result in dismissal from campus. All staff, students and staff having questions or needing information should contact Campus Police, (915) 747-5611) or Environmental Health & Safety (EH & S) (915-747-7179) and/or their professors or unit supervisors for further guidance and mentorship.

These guidelines for UTEP faculty were prepared with feedback and deliberations provided by Drs. Doug Watts, German Rosas-Acosta, Thomas Gill, and Chuan Xiao, in collaboration with members of the UTEP Faculty Senate Executive Committee members: Drs. Gina Nunez-Mchiri, Diane Monsivais, Amanda Loya, and Arturo Olivarez.