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COVID-19: A Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education UPDATED: April 21, 2020

As New Jersey continues to monitor the evolving outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its impact on communities, guidance will continue to be published and updated on the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH)'s webpage: [DOH's COVID-19 Information for Schools](#). This supplementary guidance provided by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) is intended to help institutions navigate and respond to this unprecedented public health emergency. It is intended to be supplementary to OSHE guidance issued on [March 26, 2020](#).

- **Immediate action steps.**

- Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 107](#) (which supersedes EO 104), issued by Governor Murphy on March 21, 2020, institutions of higher education shall continue to cease in-person instruction as long as Executive Order No. 107 remains in effect.
- In addition, Executive Order No. 107 cancels all gatherings of persons in the State of New Jersey unless otherwise authorized by EO No. 107, excluding normal operations at airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, office environments, factories, assemblages for the purpose of industrial or manufacturing work, construction sites, mass transit, or the purchase of groceries or consumer goods.
- Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 109](#), any institution of higher education in possession of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ventilators, respirators or anesthesia machines that are not required for the provision of critical health care services should have documented their equipment inventory.
 - Institutions can document their inventory by visiting [covid19.nj.gov/ppereport](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppereport).
 - Anyone who has PPE they wish to donate can visit [covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations).
- Institutions must transition to remote instruction immediately if they have not done so already, unless they have been granted an OSHE [waiver](#).
 - DOH has developed a [Checklist for Health Considerations for Waiver Requests](#)
- Institutions should limit in-person interaction on campus as much as possible. This includes:
 - Immediately closing all libraries and computer labs,
 - Limiting in-person gatherings of students, faculty, or staff,
 - Discouraging communal dining and moving to "grab-and-go" meal options.
 - Restricting access to community gathering places, such as athletic facilities, student centers, campus commons, theaters, art galleries, and other such areas; and
 - Moving to telework and remote work environments for as many employees and staff as possible.
- Institutions should convene their emergency management team immediately, if they have not already done so, and the teams should continue to meet on an ongoing regular basis.
- Each team should be reviewing, updating, and implementing the institution's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). As part of this process, institutions should:

- Assess whether their EOP is sufficient to address the COVID-19 situation as it evolves.
 - As a reminder, [N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69\(a\)\(1\)](#) specifically requires that the EOP addresses pandemics;
 - Implement remote learning, including making accommodations for those who lack access to either the technology or broadband internet needed to participate in online instruction and making accommodations for students with disabilities;
 - Implement plans to include considerations for students who are already food or housing insecure and who may suffer a disproportionate impact from the evolving situation;
 - Review and implement plans for the continuity of business and operations at the institution.
- **Updating EOPs.**
 - [N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69](#) requires each institution to update their EOP once every five years or immediately when an emergency incident occurs at an institution.
 - Institutions should have provided the most recently updated EOP for the institution to OSHE for review by March 15, 2020. If institutions have not submitted their EOPs, they should do so as soon as possible. As institutions update their EOPs, they should continue to send their most up-to-date EOPs to OSHE.
 - OSHE reviewed each EOP in consultation with the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and DOH.
 - OSHE sent feedback letters to institutions with suggestions on how EOPs can be strengthened to improve their response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Recommended Best Practices.**
 - Institutions should contact local health agencies and county emergency management office in order to provide their EOP.
 - Institutions can visit the [DOH's interactive local health directory map](#) to determine the local health authority within their jurisdiction.
 - Institutions can visit the [State Office of Emergency Management website](#) to determine their county coordinator.
 - Institutional leadership should monitor daily the [New Jersey Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Education, and World Health Organization](#) websites in order to obtain the most up-to-date information on this rapidly evolving situation.
 - Institutions should postpone or cancel study abroad programs.
 - Institutions should be flexible in making accommodations for students and employees who may be subject to quarantine.
 - Institutions should commit to raising awareness of the facts surrounding COVID-19 and to prevent stigmas related to COVID-19 from manifesting in their communities. The CDC maintains a [useful webpage](#) with information about the potential stigma related to the coronavirus.
 - In order to support the efforts of institutions of higher education in responding to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, OSHE developed a [COVID-19 Website Resource Guide](#) with recommendations on best practices for informational websites.
 - While circumstances may differ from one institution to another, all institutions should provide factual, up-to-date information to their respective campus communities regarding their COVID-19 response.

- A centralized COVID-19 website or webpage is successful when serving as a regularly updated “one-stop” information center for current and prospective students, faculty, staff, and families.
- It is especially effective to address frequently asked questions, as well as to tailor specific information and resources to different stakeholders.

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available. *OSHE also created a COVID-19 resource webpage available at <https://nj.gov/highereducation/COVID-19.shtml>.*

Institutions should continue to coordinate with federal, state and local officials as they develop plans for this rapidly evolving situation.

For additional clarification on potential questions related to New Jersey’s COVID-19 outbreak, please review the following:

- **NEW/UPDATED information/questions are highlighted in yellow.**

How do the Governor’s COVID-related Executive Orders impact higher education? (Updated)

On March 21, Governor Murphy announced two Executive Orders, which are available below:

- [Executive Order 107](#): Governor Murphy directed all residents to stay at home until further notice
- [Executive Order 108](#): Governor Murphy invalidates any county or municipal restriction that in any way will or might conflict with any of the provisions of Executive Order No. 107

These Executive Orders supersede previous Executive Orders. Executive Order 107 continues the cease of in-person education at higher education institutions. It places further restrictions for the health and safety of New Jerseyans, including: all gatherings are canceled and all non-essential retail businesses must indefinitely close their physical stores to the public. Institutions should limit their staff to essential employees for critical business and should implement tele-work where possible. A full list of businesses allowed to remain open is available at the COVID-19 Information Hub at covid19.nj.gov.

In addition, on March 23, Governor Murphy announced [Executive Order 109](#) which suspends all elective surgeries and invasive procedures to preserve essential equipment and hospital capacity. This Executive Order required all institutions of higher learning in possession of PPE, ventilators, respirators, or anesthesia machines that are not required for the provision of critical health care services to document their inventory of such supplies. If institutions have not done so already, inventory can be documented by visiting covid19.nj.gov/ppereport.

How does the Governor’s most recent Executive Order regarding essential construction impact higher education?

On April 2, Governor Murphy announced Executive Order 122, ceasing all construction projects deemed non-essential (<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-122.pdf>). EO 122 defines “essential construction projects” as projects including the following:

- Higher education facilities
- Health care services
- Affordable residential housing
- Single-family/individual homes
- Data centers or facilities
- Essential social services, such as food pantries
- Support for law enforcement agencies or first responder units

- Necessary emergency repairs to ensure the health and safety of residents
- Any work on a non-essential construction project required to physically secure the site or address any hazards on a site

Institutions with ongoing construction should adhere to social distancing practices including, but not limited to, prohibiting site entrance from non-essential visitors, refraining from holding meetings with 10 or more individuals, maintaining 6-feet of social distance from other workers, staggering work schedules to limit the number of individuals working or entering/leaving a site at any given time, requiring workers and visitors to wear cloth face coverings, requiring infection control practices, and limiting sharing of equipment. Institutions are also required to provide face coverings, gloves, and sanitization materials to workers at the expense of the institution.

The EO also details guidelines for the necessary reporting and management of workers that exhibit symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

Our institution wants to help with the state response. What can we do or who should we reach out to? (Updated)

Institutions have stepped up to help with the COVID-19 response in their communities, and we greatly appreciate the work happening across the state. As needed, agencies may reach out to institutions to serve as testing sites, etc. A map of testing sites is available [here](#).

New Jersey hospitals, health care workers and first responders are on the front lines fighting this pandemic, and the State appreciates individuals’ desire to help. The State is in need of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical equipment. Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 109](#), any institution of higher education in possession of PPE, ventilators, respirators or anesthesia machines that are not required for the provision of critical health care services should have documented their equipment inventory. If you have not done so already, institutions can document their inventory by visiting [covid19.nj.gov/ppereport](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppereport).

Institutions can also donate to their communities by contacting their [local office of emergency management](#). If individuals are interested in donating supplies, please visit [covid19.nj.gov/forms/ppedonations](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/forms/ppedonations). Donors should please check this form periodically in case the list of necessary items gets updated.

The State also needs the help of qualified health, mental health and related professionals to supplement New Jersey’s health care capacity on a temporary basis. Individuals who are willing and able to support the State’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak can visit [covid19.nj.gov/forms/volunteer](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/forms/volunteer). A state representative will reach out with more details to pair individuals’ skillsets with unmet needs.

The State also welcomes offers of assistance from technology professionals and firms looking to help in the fight against COVID-19. A [Tech Talent portal](#) is available for people with experience in a variety of technological areas to provide support.

Institutions should also consider providing any remaining food resources to local pantries if available and not in use on their campus. The State also launched a new webpage for volunteers. The most immediate needs are for people to help deliver meals to elderly or otherwise vulnerable residents, and to assist at food pantries. Visit <http://covid19.nj.gov/help> and click on “Volunteer in Your Community.”

What are the guidelines requiring face coverings?

In addition to infection control practices and maintaining 6-foot social distancing, the CDC now recommends wearing cloth face coverings in any public settings, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.

Cloth face coverings can be made from household items or from any low-cost, common materials. Any surgical masks or N-95 respirators should be reserved for medical professionals or healthcare workers.

These cloth face coverings should not be used for children under 2 years of age, any individual with trouble breathing, or who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cover without assistance.

For more information on how to wear and tutorials on how to make cloth face coverings, institutions can direct employees and students to the CDC “Use of Cloth Face Coverings” fact sheet:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/DIY-cloth-face-covering-instructions.pdf>.

What should institutions do for students who do not have access to internet or technology needed to access internet? (Updated)

Many institutions kept their libraries and computer labs open with limited use to assist students who did not have access to internet and technology. In light of the evolving situation, institutions should try to determine alternatives to assist students. This may include:

- Providing loaner laptops/computers to students, and
- providing students with a list of internet service providers who have begun to provide hotspots and free or reduced-price services to individuals who may not otherwise be able to afford service.

If institutions cannot provide remote technology solutions for students and/or students are unable to access the technology needed to complete their coursework, then students should be allowed to complete their coursework at a later date.

In addition, Governor Murphy signed [Executive Order 126](#) prohibiting cable and telecommunications providers from terminating internet and voice service.

A major initiative of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the Keeping Americans Connected pledge. There are over 700 companies that took this pledge to keep Americans connected during COVID-19. For a list of internet resources through the FCC please follow this link. <https://www.fcc.gov/service-providers-pledge-consumer-support-during-pandemicduring>. From this link you can go to many of the listed company’s websites to see what they are offering to students. Many have search tools to check for hotspots in your area.

OSHE does not endorse any of these providers, but is providing this information as a resource in good faith.

How can institutions support their hourly employees? (Updated)

Institutions should try to continue supporting their employees during this situation to the extent possible. Institutions may want to consider if they can shift an employee’s work responsibilities (within reason) or check with institutional foundations for additional support. We recognize this situation will cause financial hardship for students, families, and organizations.

The State launched a [COVID-19 Jobs and Hiring Portal](#) for those who may have lost their jobs or had their hours reduced as a result of the pandemic. Businesses across New Jersey need thousands of workers for immediate hire.

Employers in critical industries should submit information about openings with urgent hiring needs related to COVID-19 at jobs.covid19.nj.gov/intake.

Below is additional guidance and resources provided by both the State and Federal Department of Labor:

New Jersey Department of Labor, What Employees Should Know: <https://www.nj.gov/labor/worker-protections/earnedsick/covid.shtml>

US Department of Labor, Coronavirus Resources:
<https://www.dol.gov/coronavirus>

Are there mental health resources available to students, staff and faculty during this time? (Updated)

We recognize this is a time of high anxiety and change for students, staff and faculty. If you're concerned about your mental health, there is a free helpline available through the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS). NJMentalHealthCares offers telephone counseling, emotional support, information and assistance. The helpline is available seven days per week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at 866-202-HELP (4357). DHS is also offering emotional help and support to deaf and hard of hearing individuals during COVID-19. Sign language users can communicate with ACCESS of St. Joseph's Health in Paterson through video phone at 973-870-0677, Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) also has a crisis text line: text NJ to 74174. A trained counselor will respond and help you through concerns.

As a state institution, we have to hold tuition hearings. How should we continue doing this? (Updated)

State statute requires some institutions to hold tuition hearings. Due to current guidelines, we recommend tuition hearings be held via webinar or virtual meeting. While we recognize moderated webinars are not a perfect substitute, it allows institutions to still reach out to constituents, while accounting for health and safety in the current climate.

Meetings in which regular business will be discussed and are being held remotely, either via telephone conference call or an internet/computer based program that are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq. ("OPMA"), should continue being noticed consistent with the "adequate notice" provision of OPMA. N.J.S.A. 10:4-8. The notice should include information as to how members of the public can either call in (telephone conference call) or provide a link (internet/computer based program). Although not required, it is also recommended that this information be posted on your institution's website.

In the event a meeting subject to the OPMA also includes an executive or closed session, arrangements should be made to conduct those sessions either via a separate conference call in number or internet/computer based program that is not shared with the public. Other obligations imposed by OPMA are unaffected.

In the event a meeting needs to be held that pertains to the state of emergency, a recently-enacted law, P.L. 2020, c.11, permits such meetings to be held remotely as well (i.e., telephone conference call or internet/computer based program). Such meetings need only be noticed consistent with N.J.S.A. 10:4-9.1. To the extent practicable, such meetings are limited to matters related to the state of emergency.

How should universities handle complaints, conduct hearings, adjudications, investigations, and other university policy-related proceedings during a school closure or transition to distance learning?

(Updated)

Institutions must consider ways to conduct any in-person activities virtually, while maintaining compliance with all federal and/or state laws, including timely notifications about hearings to stakeholders involved. Students, faculty, and staff should have clear instructions on how to report or submit formal complaints (i.e. incidences of bias, online bullying, Title IX violations etc.) during a school closure. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Title IX obligations remain in place and institutions must provide "prompt and equitable resolutions" for student complaints related to gender-based and sexual harassment and discrimination.

How should an institution address possible material hardships that students might face as a result of that institution's closing? (Updated)

OSHE recommends that institutions implement plans for appropriate, alternative accommodations for students that either use the institution's campus as their primary residence or who cannot easily return home in the event of a campus shutdown. As part of this planning and preparation, institutions should consider options for making the campus accessible to students who do not have another residence. Institutions should also consider either preparing campus food pantries or working with local community food pantries to help food-insecure students locate food sources.

Students and families can visit njhelps.org to determine if they are eligible for food assistance through New Jersey's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), cash assistance through the WorkFirst NJ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or General Assistance (GA) programs, and health insurance through NJ FamilyCare/Medicaid.

The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) also has a variety of programs that can help with rent/heating costs, prevention of eviction and reduction of utility bills. Individuals can visit the [DCAid webpage](#) to go through a screening process to determine if they are eligible for the assistance programs.

The Department of Education recently released guidelines governing the student emergency grant portion of the Higher Education Relief Fund as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Institutions may find more information on how to apply for this funding at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/caresact.html>

Are there cleaning protocols for COVID-19 that institutions should be aware of? (Updated)

Institutions should follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-[registered product](#) for use against COVID-19. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys. Information on cleaning and disinfecting your facilities can be found [here](#). Increasing the frequency of cleaning when there is an increase in respiratory or other seasonal illness is always a recommended prevention and control measure.

DOH also recommends that institutions increase education on respiratory hygiene. Students, faculty and staff should all be asked to follow these steps that prevent the transmission of respiratory infections:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, not hands.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Stay home from class and work if you're sick.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Adhere to exclusion recommendations from public health. For acute respiratory illness - fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication.
- Separate sick students and staff from others until they can go home.
- Provide adequate supplies, including clean and functional handwashing stations, soap, paper towels, and alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage routine surface cleaning through education, policy, and the provision of supplies.
- Get a flu shot – it's not too late to be protected.

How can I help share facts and resources with higher education stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students? (Updated)

In order to supplement the efforts of institutions of higher education in responding to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, OSHE developed recommendations on best practices for COVID-19 informational websites. While circumstances may differ from one institution to another, all institutions should provide factual, up-to-date information to their respective campus communities regarding their COVID-19 response. A centralized COVID-19 website or webpage is successful when serving as a regularly updated “one-stop” information center for current and prospective students, faculty, staff, and families. It is especially effective to address frequently asked questions, as well as to tailor specific information and resources to different stakeholders.

The CDC has also provided [several resources](#) that can be printed and shared in public areas, shared on social media or distributed via email. These resources currently include posters detailing: facts about COVID-19, what to do if you are sick, how to stop the spread of germs and how to properly wash your hands. There are also videos and a public health image library available.

In addition, [DOH](#) and [OSHE](#) will continue to post updates on their social media pages, which can be shared with stakeholders.