

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education Releases Restart Standards for New Jersey Colleges and Universities

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) today [issued standards for institutions of higher education](#) as they begin restarting campus operations impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The standards align with the stages of New Jersey’s [“The Road Back: Restoring Economic Health Through Public Health”](#) plan and provide a framework of critical standards, additional steps institutions should consider when formulating plans, and examples of safeguarding practices in 10 key on-campus functional areas: instruction, residential housing, computer laboratories, libraries, research, student services, transportation, dining, international travel, and athletics.

As of July 1, in-person clinical rotations and labs will be able to resume at institutions of higher education, subject to submission of a restart plan to OSHE. As detailed in [Executive Order 155](#), institutions must submit a restart plan to OSHE no later than 14 days of the expected implementation date of their plans. Each institutional plan must follow a phased approach in accordance with OSHE standards issued today and any future supplemental documents.

“Sustained positive public health trends have allowed New Jersey to enter stage two on the road back to our ‘new normal,’ and after a period of uncertainty, we are pleased to be at a point where we can safely begin restarting campus operations for students, faculty and staff,” **said Dr. Zakiya Smith Ellis, Secretary of Higher Education.** “An equitable restart of operations must be done carefully through an iterative, staged process that balances the desire to move forward with concerns for public health. We know many students prefer learning in-person, particularly those who experience hardship and whose home environments are not conducive to online education. As we seek to ensure appropriate measures are in place so educational activity can continue, the health and safety of the entire campus community will remain our priority.”

Members of the Higher Education Restart Advisory Group, which includes representatives of all higher education sectors, faculty, staff, and students, offered input that shaped these standards. Best practices to ensure key aspects of a successful restart of higher education activities were considered.

Throughout each stage, institutions must continue observing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) [standards](#) for social distancing (6 feet), sanitizing equipment and materials, handwashing, cleaning and disinfection, and accommodating individuals with symptoms or a positive diagnosis of COVID-19. In all stages, institutions with residential housing facilities must have a designated space for individuals who

reside on campus and are quarantining or isolating with symptoms or a positive diagnosis of COVID-19.

Institutions are instructed to require face coverings for faculty, staff, students, and visitors, except where doing so would inhibit the individual's health. Institutions must adhere to mandatory statewide restrictions in place throughout each stage, including all applicable Executive Orders, until a "new normal" is reached – when a vaccine or effective treatment is broadly available – but can adapt recommendations to best fit their communities' needs and context. Institutions must remain flexible to modify operations as public health conditions change and the state shifts from one stage to the next.

Below, please find details of the protocols and procedures to be implemented at each stage of Governor Phil Murphy's "[The Road Back: Restoring Economic Health Through Public Health](#)" plan.

STAGE 1:

- All in-person **instruction**, including labs, clinical rotations and all other curricular activity is prohibited, unless a [waiver](#) supported by a compelling rationale is obtained from the Secretary of Higher Education.
- No students are allowed to reside in **on-campus residential facilities**, except for those enrolled in courses/programs with an in-person approved waiver or in narrowly-defined extenuating circumstances who are already present on campus.
- **Computer laboratories** and **libraries** remain closed. Institutions should explore potential alternatives, such as providing each student with a laptop and internet access. Returned items should be sanitized wherever possible.
- In-person **dining** facilities are closed. Takeout, "grab-and-go," and/or delivery may be available to those who must continue to reside on campus.

STAGE 2:

The following is effective beginning July 1, 2020.

- Most in-person **instruction** remains limited to instances where a [waiver](#) is obtained from the Secretary. However, in-person instruction of curricula that require labs, technical, clinical, or hands-on instruction and therefore cannot be readily taught other than through in-person instruction can resume with adherence to strict health and safety protocols.
- A limited number of students (based on capacity restrictions) can return to **on-campus residential facilities**. Full occupancy of buildings is not acceptable for restart plans. Institutions must reduce density of residential living spaces to the extent practicable. Institutions should be mindful of students for whom residential housing is necessary for an equitable education. Common areas are closed, and outside visitors to residence halls must be limited to those present for delivery, maintenance or an emergency.

- **Computer laboratories** remain closed. Curbside pickup or delivery of remotely-requested printed materials is available. This should be done by appointment.
- **Libraries** may open in a limited fashion in accordance with the applicable state health and safety requirements.
- **Dining:** Takeout or “grab and go” options should remain available. Outdoor dining only is allowed pursuant to statewide occupancy, health, and safety requirements.

STAGE 3:

- Most in-person classroom **instruction**, labs, and other curricular activity are permitted in accordance with state-established occupancy restrictions and health and safety restrictions.
- Institutions may continue to operate **on-campus residential facilities** at reduced capacity. Full occupancy of buildings is not acceptable for restart plans. Institutions must reduce density of residential living spaces to the extent practicable. Students with greatest need are prioritized for housing, given the reduced capacity. Common areas may open if the layout allows for social distancing and adherence to any state occupancy guidelines at that time.
- **Computer laboratories** and **libraries** may open in a limited fashion in accordance with applicable state occupancy, health, and safety restrictions. Curbside pickup or delivery remains available.
- In-person indoor **dining** facilities may open with a limited occupancy based on state guidelines in place at the time. Institutions must adhere to all CDC and DOH protocols. Takeout or “grab and go” options should remain available. Outside dining may continue pursuant to strict health and safety guidelines.

Two key public health drivers of success throughout all restart stages will be robust testing and contact tracing. Institutions will be responsible for establishing testing protocols on their campus for employees and students that are updated as new information becomes available. Institutions should work with their local health department to develop testing plans and to integrate contact tracing efforts.

At the end of May, OSHE also released [commencement ceremony guidance](#) for institutions of higher education that outline considerations for modified in-person graduation ceremonies beginning on July 6, 2020. Institutions that are planning graduations should prepare for a 500-person limit to be in place on and after July 6. OSHE’s guidance includes requirements that ceremonies be held outdoors, adhere to social distancing protocols, and restrict capacity to protect the health and safety of students and families celebrating these milestones.

All institutions that plan to hold modified in-person ceremonies must certify to OSHE – via an online [submission form](#) – that the planned ceremony will comply with applicable requirements for gatherings, including those addressing social distancing. The form must be submitted no later than seven days prior to the scheduled date of the ceremony.

Institutions should continue monitoring federal and state guidance as the situation evolves and frequently visit [OSHE's COVID-19 resource page](#) for updates.