

# **EOHSI**

## **Return To In Person/On Site Work and Research**

**June 21, 2021**

### **Introduction**

On May 27th, President Holloway announced that it was time for everyone who works or studies at Rutgers to physically return to all Rutgers campuses by July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The return will be guided by three overarching principles: 1) fulfilling our mission as a university, 2) a commitment to use the best available science to maintain the health and safety of our community, and 3) that we all have a shared responsibility to ensure the repopulation is safe and equitable. This means all are expected to return while allowing some level of flexibility, and that we keep ourselves and others safe.

I ask you reread President Holloway's message and explore the links provided therein to resources that will guide our return. Also realize that as the pandemic progresses these guidelines will change so you also have a responsibility to keep yourself informed. To aid in that process, we will send updates to this document as necessitated by changing guidelines and situations.

While guidelines are being developed by all units of the University. EOHSI is unique in several ways that will necessitate more protective practices than other units. In addition to our research labs, we are a clinical operation. Moreover, we treat almost 2000 of the New Jersey First Responders who worked at the 9/11 site. Many of these heroes have severe respiratory problems and hence are at

greater risk for the effects of COVID. **We have a shared responsibility to protect this vulnerable population.** If you work in our building, you will therefore be required to follow our guidelines, even if they are more protective than those of other units, the governor, or the CDC.

## Vaccination

- Through herd immunity, vaccines protect those in the population who are vulnerable, cannot be administered the vaccine for health reasons or are below the current approved age. By getting vaccinated you are not only protecting yourself but those who are at risk.
- All students and residents returning to Rutgers (including EOHSI) are **required** to fully vaccinated at least two weeks before returning to EOHSI. While there is not yet a similar mandate for faculty and staff, **you are strongly urged you to consider getting vaccinated before returning.** It is very disingenuous to require students to get vaccinated while we evoke excuses for ourselves.
- If you are vaccinated, please enter your proof of vaccine into the Rutgers portal. If you do, you will no longer be required to take the weekly PCR (saliva) test.
- Anyone who has concerns or questions about getting the SARS-CoV-2 , should consult their physician. While it is true that a small fraction of the population may be at some risk, the conditions underlying these risks are exceedingly rare.
- Available scientific data indicate that RNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines) are among the most effective vaccines ever developed. One need we need only look to countries like Israel where the entire population has been vaccinated. Their pandemic is over, and life is essentially returning to normal.
- The RNA based vaccines NOT new or untested. They have been used to treat cancer patients for a about 12 years. We have now vaccinated almost

half the country with very few adverse events consistent with any drug or vaccine. The hype in the media suggesting that these vaccines “cause” specific diseases are largely unfounded and dangerous. More importantly, the rate of such events is minimal, especially when compared to your risk of serious complications from getting the virus. Those with a scientific background are therefore urged to look at the data for themselves before concluding that the media is correct. Also keep abreast of CDC recommendations.

- If you feel that you require an exemption from being vaccinated, we will be flexible, but remember that you will bear an additional responsibility in ensuring the safety of others as well as your own, as you will be most at risk.
- **Failure to be vaccinated does not exempt you from coming back to work.**

## Monitor your symptoms and exposures

- Regardless of your vaccine status, you are required to monitor your symptoms each day before coming to work.
- You are required to enter your symptoms into the MyCampusPass questionnaire found on your MyRutgers.com portal. Do not come to work if your Campus Pass is not approved and inform your supervisor.
- Choosing no to fill out your MyCampusPass form does NOT exempt you from returning to your work responsibilities.

## Testing

- If you are not vaccinated, **you must continue** to be tested on a **weekly** basis until informed otherwise.

- If you are fully vaccinated, you do **NOT** need to get a COVID test before returning to work unless you have symptoms or are exposed to someone with a confirmed COVID diagnosis.

If you are vaccinated and entered your status into MyCampusPass you are not required to undergo routine weekly testing unless you have been exposed to someone with a COVID test, or symptoms consistent with COVID.

- If you have symptoms or have been exposed to someone with symptoms that are consistent with COVID, you will need to get a COVID test prior to returning to work. Contact the Employee Health Clinic to set up a test. Depending on **your** Test result, you will be cleared or not cleared for returning to work. You **MUST** get clearance from Employee Health before returning to work at EOHSI.

## Masks

- The decision to wear a mask or refusing to do so in a highly contentious issues that continues to divide our country. All masks provide some degree of protection. How effective they are can vary from less than 10% to almost 100% protection, depending on type and how it is worn. While surgical, procedure and cloth masks do not provide a high level of protection to the wearer, they do reduce the chance of an infected person spreading the virus via larger droplets, and the protection is doubled if the other person is also wearing a mask.
- Given our vulnerable patient populations and the potential for unvaccinated persons returning to work, we will retain the mask requirement for all EOHSI personnel when in public spaces.
- All clinical personnel and staff must wear masks at all time when in common areas of the clinic and when seeing patients. .
- Masks must be worn at all times by anyone else entering in the clinic area, the first floor of EOHSI, and in all other public areas of the building.

- The type of mask used should be appropriate for the task at hand. “Gators” and bandanas are not appropriate face covering and are not allowed. If you need a mask, one will be provided by the main office on the second floor of EOHSI.
- You do not need to wear a mask if you are in your office or other private area or in an office with one other person and both of you are vaccinated.
- Those who are vaccinated may gather in groups of up to 5 vaccinated people in a private space. If you are not vaccinated or choose not to disclose your vaccine status and choose not to wear a mask, you may not join such gathering nor may you enter the EOHSI building.
- Choosing not to wear a mask does NOT exempt you from returning to your work responsibilities.

## **Handwashing**

- Until informed otherwise, we will retain the recommendation for frequent handwashing according to the posted CDC guidelines
- You are also encouraged to use the hand sanitizer dispensers installed around the institute. Ask for instructions if unsure of their proper use and limitations.
- Clinical personnel and staff should continue to follow guidelines specified by the clinic director.

## **Social Distancing**

- Maintain social distancing at all times in the building.
- Some spaces in the building may not accommodate all employees. If this is the case for your work area, please work with your supervisor to develop a

staggered work schedule among coworkers. Alternatively, you can ask the office of Central Administration for additional temporary space.

- At the start of the pandemic, furniture in common areas was rearranged to prevent gathering that violated social distancing. Do not rearrange furniture in common areas, even if you are vaccinated or part of a group that is vaccinated.
- Follow directional signs in hallways and limit capacity of elevators restrooms, etc. to posted limits. If none is posted use your common sense.

## Building Entry

- For the foreseeable future, the EOHSI building will continue to be locked at all times.
- No one who does not have official business in EOHSI shall be allowed in the building without prior clearance by the office of the Director.
- All visitors must register with the EOHSI Central Administration 24 hours prior to entry, wear a mask and follow all guidelines.
- Do **NOT** admit anyone you do not know into the building. No unauthorized person shall enter the clinic space at any time without clearance from the Clinic staff.

## Teaching

- All classes in the fall are expected to be in-person.
- Nonetheless, social distancing will still be required, and students must wear masks in class.

- This directive from the University leadership will present challenges for larger classes. Instructors will be responsible for developing a format that limits the number of in-person students, for example having cohorts of students that alternate between in person and online learning.
- EOHSI Room C was outfitted with a camera system that allows classes to be held in a hybrid mode, whereby some students are virtual and others online and able to see and be seen, allowing for participation. We are working to make all conference rooms within EOHSI virtual meeting (zoom or webex or Teams) capable.
- If you teach or meet with students from SPH or Pharmacy in the EOHSI building, please make them aware our guidelines

## **Precautions in laboratory spaces and common areas**

- At the beginning of the pandemic, many labs were modified to allow for social distancing with barriers, etc. Please do not alter lab configuration without prior approval.
- For all common areas in the labs, core facilities, eating areas. etc., everyone will be responsible for disinfecting surfaces with an approved disinfectant.

## **Return to Work Logistics:**

While we are all expected to return to work beginning July 6<sup>th</sup>, it may not be possible for everyone to return all at once. The process will be largely governed by practicality of practicing social distancing.

- Those with their own office space are expected to return full time and follow the guidelines above.
- Individuals who share office space will have to evaluate the situation and work with their supervisor to develop a return-to-work schedule. If two people share an office and both have verified their vaccine status in the Rutgers portal, both can return to work on July sixth
- Individuals who share space with more than one person will have to work with their supervisor to find a solution. This could include staggering work schedules, working from home one day a week, or requesting additional temporary space.
- Despite any accommodations that need to be made, all EOHSI personnel are required to be on site for a minimum of four days a week. This will ensure equity.
- Anyone who feels that they have a legitimate health reason or other issues to circumvent these guidelines must get a dispensation from the Director of employee health to continue working at home full time.

**Helmut Zarbl, Director of EOHSI.**