

NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



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GOVERNOR

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ACTING CABINET SECRETARY

November 13, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Higher Education Presidents, Chancellors, and Administrators
FROM: Stephanie Rodriguez, Acting Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Higher Education Department
RE: Public Health Order and Higher Education Institutions

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and state health officials announced a temporary reissuance of a statewide [public health order](#) closing in-person services for all non-essential activities in order to blunt the unprecedented spike of COVID-19 illnesses, and to attempt to relieve dramatically escalating strain on hospitals and health care providers across the state.

The heightened restrictions statewide, enacted through an amended emergency public health order issued by the New Mexico Department of Health, will be in effect for two weeks, effective Monday, November 16, through Monday, November 30. Given the short notice provided for the new public health order, the New Mexico Higher Education Department will work with colleges, universities, and special schools to move instruction and operations to a remote format for the remainder of the Fall semester following the Thanksgiving holiday.

Non-essential personnel should begin working remotely beginning Monday, November 16, or the earliest date possible. Currently-scheduled essential hybrid and in-person courses may continue until instruction can be transitioned to remote learning following the Thanksgiving holiday. Exceptions will be made for healthcare and vocational clinical activities required for program licensure.

Residence life and housing operations for students can remain open during this time. All New Mexicans, including students and families residing on-campus, must stay at home except for outings that are essential to health, safety, and welfare. Students can continue to attend essential hybrid and in-person classes until remote learning becomes available.

All institutions are also required to adhere to the [COVID-Safe Practices for Intercollegiate Sports](#) and no exceptions can be made for athletics activities. This includes:

- All activities must occur in groups of no more than five (5) persons in an enclosed space or outdoor facility including practices and trainings.
- No practice can occur in a county with a 14-day average daily case count of more than eight per 100,000 and a test positivity rate over five (5) percent. Groups and individuals cannot travel to another county to practice or train.

Please see the frequently asked questions for more information. Thank you for your ongoing support in protecting New Mexicans as we face the challenges ahead.

Frequently Asked Questions

Higher Education Employees

Is there a standard definition for the term “essential worker?”

The New Mexico Department of Health has identified the following occupational groups as being essential:

- Health care operations
- Homeless shelters, food banks, and other services providing indigent care
- Childcare facilities
- Grocery stores, supermarkets, food banks, farmers’ markets, and food vendors
- Farms, ranches, and other food cultivation, processing, or packaging operations
- Infrastructure operations including, but not limited to, public works construction, construction and maintenance, technology support operations, and telecommunications systems
- Manufacturing operations
- Services necessary to maintain the safety and sanitation including security services, towing services, custodial services, plumbers, electricians, and other skilled trades
- Veterinary and livestock services
- Media services
- Automobile repair facilities, bike repair facilities, and retailers
- Utilities, including their contractors, suppliers, and supportive operations
- Hardware stores and other large retailers
- Laundromats and dry cleaner services
- Crematoriums, funeral homes, and cemeteries
- Banks, credit unions, insurance providers, payroll services, brokerage services, and investment management firms
- Businesses providing mailing and shipping services
- Laboratories and defense and national security-related operations supporting the United States government, a contractor to the United States government, or any federal entity
- Professional services, such as legal or accounting services, but only where necessary to assist in compliance with legally mandated activities
- Logistics and other businesses that store, transport, or deliver groceries, food, materials, goods, or services directly to residences, retailers, government institutions, or essential businesses

What is the operating occupancy for colleges and universities during this time?

Colleges and universities are encouraged to implement telework assignments where possible and limit in-person work to essential employees and functions. Essential operations shall be limited to 25% of the maximum occupancy of any enclosed space on the campus, as determined by the relevant fire marshal or fire department. Each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring faculty and staff members follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#), and [COVID-safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

What is the definition of a high-risk individual?

Some people may be more likely to have severe illness than others because they have medical conditions that increase their COVID-19 risk such as older age or having certain underlying conditions. A high-risk individual is a person who has an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Some underlying conditions that can contribute to this include, but are not limited to, diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, autoimmune disorders, heart conditions, and more.

We recognize that there will be students, faculty, and staff members who will be considered to be a high-risk group as defined by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). We encourage all colleges and universities to establish policies to support these individuals during the span of the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Mexico Department of Health follows CDC's established guidance for [high-risk individuals and individuals living with high-risk groups](#).

Who should I contact if I believe my college is overlooking a provision within the public health order or executive orders?

If you believe your college or university is overlooking the State of New Mexico's orders, please contact your institution to discuss your concerns. A contact for each public higher education institution is available at [RestartNewMexico.us](#). If reporting structures are not established or if you have outstanding concerns, please report non-compliance to the State of New Mexico by clicking [here](#). Your personal information will not be collected to report non-compliance.

Higher Education Students

If I have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, what should I do?

To protect others, **do not attend in-person classes, including clinicals, or work**. Please get tested and self-quarantine as quickly as possible. You can contact the student health and wellness center on your campus, or visit the New Mexico Department of Health's [COVID-19 Screening and Testing Sites](#) webpage to find your nearest testing site.

As with any respiratory illness, you should eliminate contact with other people while you are sick, wear a face covering, cough or sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands), and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Can my college or university require that I attend a class in person?

Colleges and universities are being asked to discontinue in-person instruction for the remainder of the Fall semester following the Thanksgiving Holiday, except in limited cases. These include healthcare and vocational clinical activities required for program licensure. Each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring these experiences follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID-safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

There may be a point in time in which a student will have to miss a class due to COVID-19 isolation or quarantine requirements. We encourage you to work with your instructor and college to complete the course requirements.

Will I be required to complete my clinical, practicum or field-based experience in person?

Exceptions will be made for healthcare and vocational clinical activities required for program licensure. Nonetheless, each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring the site for these experiences follows all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID-safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

Will I need to take exams in person?

Only courses requiring in-person exams for licensing may require you to test in-person. In that instance, your higher education institution must follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID-safe practices](#), which includes mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

Who do I speak with if I have concerns with the quality of my online or hybrid course?

You are encouraged to start by contacting the course instructor as they may be able to quickly resolve your concerns. Other appropriate institutional contacts include department leadership and the dean of instruction. Additionally, institutions will typically provide students with a post-course survey that captures input on course quality. If issues are not resolved through the above recommendations, you may submit an inquiry to the New Mexico Higher Education Department by clicking [here](#).

Can my college or university still provide food services?

Food and drink establishments may not provide any indoor or outdoor dine-in service, but may provide carryout service or delivery service. For dining services, all higher education institutions are subject to the public health order surrounding restaurants and food service.

My clinical, practicum or field-based experience is located outside of New Mexico. Is there any exception to the self-quarantine requirement?

If you are a student who has a clinical in the healthcare field that is in a bordering state to New Mexico, you may attend your clinical and return to New Mexico without self-quarantining upon return. All colleges and universities are encouraged to implement a policy that requires students to attest they will only attend their clinical and return to New Mexico without stopping at a place or business in the other state.

Who do I speak with if I have concerns with the quality of my online or hybrid course?

You are encouraged to start by contacting the course instructor as they may be able to quickly resolve your concerns. Other appropriate institutional contacts include department leadership and the dean of instruction. Additionally, institutions will typically provide students with a post-course survey that captures input on course quality. If issues are not resolved through the above recommendations, you may submit an inquiry to the New Mexico Higher Education Department by clicking [here](#).

Who do I contact if I have questions about my financial aid eligibility which was impacted by COVID-19?

First, contact your institution's financial aid office. If there are questions after contacting the institution's financial aid office, students and parents may also contact our agency's [Financial Aid Division](#) via email at fin.aid@state.nm.us or call us at 1-800-279-9777.

Other Information

What are the signs and symptoms on COVID-19?

Living in a COVID-positive world requires discipline from all of us. In order for the rate of spread of COVID-19 to decrease enough for higher education institutions and businesses to safely reopen, it is imperative that New Mexicans stay home as much as possible. Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 include: cough, fever, shortness of breath, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, and/or loss of taste or smell.

If you present any of these symptoms or if you have been in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should get tested as soon as possible.

COVID-19 Statewide Response Referral Numbers

- Coronavirus Information Hotline: 1-833-551-0518
- Coronavirus Health Hotline: 1-855-600-3453
- Crisis and Access Hotline: 1-855-662-7474

Other Education and Child Care Questions

- K-12 Public Education: 1-833-415-0567
- Early Childhood Education and Care: 1-800-691-9067

Questions

If you have any questions, please contact the New Mexico Higher Education Department at NMHED.COVID@state.nm.us. The email is monitored regularly and a representative will respond promptly.