

UT Southwestern Medical Center

Transition to Phase 3 Campus Operations to Begin May 1

March 31, 2021

To the UT Southwestern Community:

In November, I announced the decision to extend Phase 2 campus operations to May 1. Today, I am writing to communicate plans for campus operations beyond May 1 in the hope that this information will be helpful to all. I also invite you to listen to [today's campus briefing](#) when I addressed this same topic.

As I have emphasized in the past, our top priority throughout the pandemic has been – and continues to be – the safety of our campus community and our patients. At my request, the Emergency Operations Committee/Return to Operations Committee (E/ROC) developed specific criteria to guide our decision-making about how and when we could safely expand activities on campus. These include both internal criteria such as monitoring our census of COVID-19 patients; supply of personal protective equipment (PPE); the number of UTSW employees with workplace-acquired cases of COVID-19; the percentage of UTSW employees vaccinated; as well as external criteria such as the combined cases and projections for Dallas, Collin, Denton, and Tarrant counties.

I am very pleased to report that we have seen significant improvements in all these metrics. Given the encouraging trends – notably the increase in vaccinations, the absence of any on-campus transmissions of COVID-19 in more than two months and declines in community infections and hospitalized patients – I have endorsed the recommendations of the E/ROC to transition from Phase 2 to Phase 3, effective Saturday, May 1.

Below are some highlights from the Phase 3 guidelines, which will help to ensure that we build on our progress.

Continued safety measures

During Phase 3, a mask or other appropriate face covering will continue to be required inside all facilities, except when alone in a private office. Physical distancing must also be practiced wherever possible. Masks will no longer be required outdoors provided physical distancing of 6 feet is maintained.

All buildings except clinics and hospitals will continue to be badge-only access. Anyone entering hospital and clinical buildings will continue to require a temperature screening upon entry, and hospital visitors will remain limited. Hand hygiene stations also will remain in place across campus.

Key changes

Beginning May 1, personnel may return to the office full time, remain remote, or work a blended schedule based on management assessment of roles, in line with institutional policy. Over the past year, we have learned from the experiences and temporary work solutions put in place across the institution to keep our teams and patients safe. Look for new tools and capabilities in April that will help establish the best work environment for each individual as we move forward.

Our schools will resume in-person classes and other educational activities in a graduated manner; some of these may begin during the month of April. All students and instructors must continue to wear a mask and other appropriate PPE and, whenever possible, maintain safe physical distancing. Student spaces, the library, and other academic areas will reopen on May 1.

Currently, faculty investigators who wish to exceed the 50 percent lab occupancy can request permission by submitting an [application](#) to the Office of Safety and Business Continuity and emailing biosafety@utsouthwestern.edu. Starting May 1, research laboratories may return to 100 percent occupancy without prior review. All individuals must continue to wear masks and other appropriate PPE and, whenever possible, maintain safe physical distancing.

Common areas and food courts will be open with safe distancing measures. Shuttle occupancy will increase to one person per seat bench or as posted on the shuttle vehicle.

While these changes become official on May 1, we expect to expand other activities in an incremental fashion as conditions warrant, e.g., we anticipate revising allowable meeting sizes on June 1 and reopening of the fitness center in July.

With this transition to Phase 3 campus operations, I want to emphasize the importance of continual compliance in maintaining, both on campus and off, the practices that have clearly helped protect us through the past year – mask wearing, physical distancing, and other nonpharmacologic interventions. Although I am very pleased that a large majority of UTSW employees have now been fully vaccinated, I urge those who have not yet chosen to receive the vaccine to sign up in order to protect yourself and in so doing, protect our campus community and those close to you at home. I am confident that, with continued vigilance, our campus will remain a safe environment for our patients, faculty, staff, students, and other learners.

Thanks to your vigilance and determination, we are turning a corner in our efforts to safely resume more in-person operations. I look forward to having more of our community once again on campus together as we move forward to achieve our goals and advance our institutional mission.

A detailed FAQ is posted on our COVID-19 [webpage](#), which I encourage you to review. I welcome you to share any questions you may have along with your suggestions and feedback to covid-19questions@utsouthwestern.edu. I look forward to answering your questions during my biweekly Campus Briefings.

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