

UT Southwestern Medical Center

COVID-19 Campus Operations Update

Aug. 2, 2021

To the UT Southwestern community:

In recent weeks, as the Delta variant of COVID-19 has become more pervasive, there has been a significant increase in the number of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 at UT Southwestern and throughout North Texas. Additionally, our forecasting model predicts a continued escalation in the number of COVID-19 cases and the number of people requiring hospitalization. The model – which has guided our decision-making throughout the pandemic – shows that by October, hospitalizations could reach levels we saw last winter, when we experienced the most serious surge to date in North Texas. Several of the COVID-19 metrics and indicators we track closely are now “yellow” or “red,” indicating an opportunity to evaluate our current campus practices to ensure continued heightened safety across our campus and clinical locations.

As I have emphasized throughout the pandemic, our top priority continues to be the safety of our campus community, as well as the patients and families we serve. Accordingly, as I announced during my [campus briefing](#) last week, I have reconvened our Emergency Operations Committee (EOC), a group of leaders from across campus that has provided expert guidance for our operations during the pandemic.

The committee met at the end of last week and will continue to meet twice weekly to evaluate our policies and determine whether any adjustments should be made as the pandemic evolves. Based on recommendations from the EOC, the following practices should be followed at our UTSW facilities:

- Masks are required in all clinical buildings, including hospitals and clinics, and in areas where there are no patients, e.g., William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital Education and Conference Center.
- Universal masking indoors in nonclinical areas is strongly encouraged, regardless of vaccination status.
- Virtual meetings and events are highly recommended, and for in-person meeting, the size should be limited to those essential to attend.
- While physical distancing stickers will not be placed in common areas or elevators, everyone is asked to maintain safe distances whenever possible.
- If you have ANY SYMPTOMS that *could* reflect a viral infection, please stay home, consult with Occupational Health, and avoid contact with others **even if you have been vaccinated.** We now

know that symptoms in those infected who have been vaccinated are typically mild and have been often attributed by those affected to “allergies” or other causes.

In addition to the highly transmissible Delta variant, the increase in hospitalizations is also attributable to the large number of individuals in the community who are not yet vaccinated. I strongly encourage anyone who has not yet received the COVID-19 vaccine to do so for their own safety and the safety of those around them. Studies have shown that approximately 97% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients nationwide are unvaccinated – as are 99.5% of those who have died from COVID-19 in Texas since early February. While it is possible to be infected with the virus after being vaccinated, as I have noted already, symptoms from these breakthrough infections appear to be significantly milder and serious complications are rare.

Employees and the general public can easily sign up online for vaccinations here on campus, and the vaccines are widely available at retail pharmacies and other outlets throughout the region. If your friends or family members need a vaccination, we offer immediate first-dose appointments on West Campus. You can also go to the CDC’s easy-to-use vaccine finder at [vaccines.gov/search](https://www.vaccines.gov/search), or call 800-232-0233 to locate a site close to where you live. If you continue to have questions or concerns regarding the vaccine, visit our [Vaccine FAQ](#) page for more information.

We have responded effectively to changes in case rates throughout the pandemic, and I am confident that we will do so once again, maintaining the safety of our employees, patients, students, and trainees by listening to the expert guidance of our EOC, following evidence-based science, and adhering to common-sense infection prevention measures.

Our leadership team and I, together with our EOC, will continue to monitor the evolving pandemic and adjust our campus policies and practices as circumstances warrant. Look for important updates in our campus newsletter, Today@UTSW, which is emailed at 5 a.m. Monday through Friday to all employees. As always, I encourage you to submit any questions or concerns you may have to covid-19questions@utsouthwestern.edu, and I will do my best to answer them during my next briefing.

Thank you for your continued vigilance and commitment to keeping the UT Southwestern campus safe while ensuring we advance our institutional mission to promote health and a healthy society.

Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President, UT Southwestern Medical Center