

Weekly COVID Update



Bennington College - Laura Walker

Wed, Nov 10, 2021



BENNINGTON COLLEGE

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Bennington Community,

I am writing today to make you aware that we have one new student case of COVID today. We have seen the number of cases of COVID rise on our campus this week, as cases in the [surrounding areas](#) have also risen. With this additional case, we now have six students who have tested positive this week, and four current employee cases. The students who have tested positive are in quarantine in separate housing that is reserved for this purpose. All are doing well.

Now is the time to make sure that we are doing absolutely everything we can to keep our campus safe.

Most of the students who have tested positive live in one house, and we have asked that house to quarantine. Everyone in that house will be re-tested on Monday; if those results are negative, the quarantine will end. The house members have not done anything wrong; COVID is a highly transmissible illness, and our houses are close-knit communities. Quarantine is an added stress during a busy term, and I am grateful for the students' cooperation in keeping the community safe. (I am sending over some cookies as an expression of my appreciation, and I encourage you to reach out to students, classmates, and friends to offer your support.) Student Life and the Provost's Office staff have been in touch with students about meal delivery, classes, and any other concerns. The Provost's Office will be in touch with faculty members about the academic impact of this quarantine.

To this end, I want to remind you of our mandatory protocols, and introduce some new safety precautions:

- **Masking on campus**—Masks are required for everyone while indoors, except when alone in private spaces. This means everyone should be masked in classrooms, house common areas, and dining hall lines.
- **Symptom tracking**—If you develop any [COVID-like symptoms](#), please stay home; students should contact Health Services; faculty should contact Meredith Meurs; and staff should contact their supervisor.
- **Weekly Testing**—All faculty, staff, and students who are on campus, regardless of vaccination status, must be tested every week. Testing takes place in Newman Court in VAPA, Mondays through Thursdays, 8:00-11:30 am and 12:30-3:00 pm. You can schedule a test on any of those days, ideally via Co-Verified.
- ****New policy** Student access to the Dining Hall**—Any students who are not tested this week will be prohibited from eating in the dining hall, effective Monday, November 15, because of the high risk of transmission when eating in close proximity over an extended period of time. (Note that there is no testing on Fridays, so please be tested on Thursday before 3:00 pm to remain in compliance.)
- ****New policy** Student Workers**—Beginning Monday, November 15, **any students who are not in compliance with the College's mandatory weekly testing will also become ineligible to continue their on-campus work.** You and your employer will receive an email from Ali Tartaglia if you fall into that category.
- ****New policy** Faculty/staff access to the Dining Hall**—In an effort to keep students as safe as possible, any faculty and staff with a vaccination exemption may not eat in the dining hall until further notice.

Additionally, we are meeting to consider other mitigation steps, in response to current trends. We understand that there are public performances planned; Provost Maurice Hall will be meeting with the discipline groups tomorrow to discuss safety measures.

As we get closer to the end of term, with students completing final projects, papers, and performances; faculty engaging in end-of-term feedback with students; and everyone looking forward to a much-needed break with families and friends—it is critical that we get this spread under control right away. More information will come before the end of this week about any new policies.

For planning purposes, current policies and recommendations around Thanksgiving are below.

The increase of cases on campus this week is concerning, but our vaccination rates are high, and we will get through this if we stick to our safety protocols.

Thank you for all you are doing to keep our community safe.

Sincerely,



Laura Walker

Thanksgiving

- **Before Thanksgiving:** As a reminder, there will not be any testing Wednesday through Friday of Thanksgiving week. Please schedule your weekly test via CoVerified for Monday or Tuesday, 8:00-11:30 am and 12:30-3:00 pm.
- **Safer Celebrations:** Please see the CDC's guidelines for [travel](#) and [celebrations](#) in order to keep yourself, your loved ones, and the campus community as safe as possible this year.
- **After returning to campus:** As a reminder, please make sure you are tested 3-5 days after any travel or gatherings. The required weekly testing counts for this.

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