



August 13, 2021

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Tiffany Heng-Moss, Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources

Dear Colleagues,

As I shared earlier in the week, on July 27, 2021, in response to the rapid transmission of the Delta variant of COVID-19, the CDC modified its guidance; these modifications included a new recommendation that fully vaccinated individuals wear face coverings in public indoor spaces in areas with substantial or high transmission rates. At present, Lincoln-Lancaster County is a high transmission area, and the LLCHD has also recommended masks in indoor spaces. The situation across Nebraska also informed President Carter's communications on Friday, August 6, 2021.

While there is not currently a DHM for the city, campus discussions with Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department have focused on some of the particular components to classroom instruction in this environment. Those conversations are ongoing and our office and the COVID-19 task force will share updates when we receive them. I would stress our primary commitment to supporting our campus goal of successful, in-person residential education this fall and the overall achievement of the academic mission in this context.

In this letter, I am providing additional guidance with respect to requests that may arise from an individual instructor in response to a well-defined health need of an individual. Please share this information with DEOs and academic units.

Requests that may arise from an individual instructor fall into two distinct categories:

**A. Well-Defined Need of an Individual:**

If an instructor has a clearly documented need for face coverings to be required in their classes, for example a member of the instructor's household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes vaccines less effective for them, they may request to require face coverings in their classrooms.

Such requests should be submitted by the instructor directly to the College for approval using the “Request to Require Face Coverings” form. (Attached)

Colleges are responsible for reviewing such requests and must report any approved instances to the EVC Office or IANR VC Office, as appropriate, and to the relevant department chair.

If a student has a documented need for face coverings to be required in their classes, they may provide that documentation to their instructors, and the instructors may proceed as in the previous paragraph to request to require face coverings in the courses.

Please note that there are existing mechanisms for both faculty and students to request accommodations through Faculty/Staff Disability Services and through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) or Student Advocacy and Support. Those pathways remain unchanged, and may provide alternative accommodations for those who need them.

If face coverings are approved for a course through this process, failure to comply would be considered a code of conduct violation. For students, the Student Code of Conduct requires students to “refrain from conduct that threatens the safety of the community” and “interfering with an instructor’s ability to conduct class by failing to follow the instructor’s rules or instructions.” A failure to comply with a course requirement should be handled as any Student Code of Conduct violation would be: that is, the instructor should first attempt to resolve the situation individually with the student. If that attempt is unsuccessful, the situation can be elevated to the department level, then the college level, and then to Student Affairs, if necessary.

Once a request to require face coverings in a course based on a well-defined need of an individual is approved, departments and instructors must clearly communicate this information to students to ensure that they are fully aware of this requirement in the course. As described on the “Request to Require Face Coverings” form, the following language should be added to the syllabus for the course:

An individual in this course has a documented need for face coverings to be required in this course. Without divulging personal or identifying information, such a documented need might be that a member of their household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes vaccines less effective for them. As a result, the College of \_\_\_\_\_ has determined that *face coverings will be required in this course*. If you are unwilling to comply with this requirement, please visit with your advisor about different sections or possible alternative courses that you might take in lieu of this one.

It is important that departments are prepared to provide advising assistance about possible alternative courses for students who may want them.

## **B. Preference of an Individual**

If an instructor prefers that face coverings be worn in their classes but does not have a well-defined need as described above, they may *request* that students wear face coverings. They may not, however, make this a requirement.

In such circumstances, instructors may use the following statement on their syllabus to ensure that students are aware of this preference:

Given current CDC and county health guidance and the current transmission level of COVID-19 in our community, *I respectfully request that you join me in wearing a face covering during our classes.*

This guidance has arisen out of review and consultation with the UNL COVID-19 task force, the Academic Leadership Council, Chancellor Green, Judy Walker, Amy Goodburn, and members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. I also appreciate the insight and expertise of the Provost's office and the Chief Academic Officers across the NU system. I recognize that circumstances are changing quite rapidly, and I very much appreciate the thought, care, and commitment that you are each bringing to achieving our highest academic mission and our shared goal of a successful, in-person educational experience at UNL this fall.

All best,



Elizabeth Spiller  
Professor and Executive Vice Chancellor  
Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

cc: Mike Boehm, Vice Chancellor  
Laurie Bellows, Vice Chancellor  
Rich Bischoff, Associate Vice Chancellor  
Academic Affairs Leadership Team