

From: [McWilliams, Matthew](#)
To: [All Faculty, Staff & Contract Employees](#)
Subject: Campus Mask Policy - Important Update
Date: Friday, February 25, 2022 11:10:35 AM

Dear Longwood Community,

For two years now, thanks to your collective efforts, Longwood has successfully navigated the challenges of Covid-19, preserving campus vitality and in-person learning.

We've committed that any restrictions we imposed would be tied to public health conditions. Honoring that commitment means loosening those restrictions when conditions allow.

Today we are announcing that starting tomorrow (Saturday, Feb. 26), masking will no longer be required indoors on campus – except in classrooms during scheduled academic classes, where the masking requirement will remain for now.

This means masking is now optional in residence halls, offices and campus buildings and venues. Faculty and staff may still require masking within their own private offices. And of course, community members may choose to continue to wear masks if they wish.

This is a decision we've taken in close consultation with other Virginia public universities, who are contemplating similar steps, and with the Virginia Department of Health.

We are taking this step first because the Omicron, which generally involves less serious illness, has receded nationally and here on campus. Second, we are a well-vaccinated community, with well-ventilated buildings, and ample testing and support resources in place to manage Covid-19 cases on campuses as we encounter them. Masking is just one factor in Covid mitigation. The totality of steps in place here give us greater leeway to move forward – and meet the commitment we made to adjust our masking policy as soon as conditions allow.

To answer a few questions you may have:

Why will the requirement remain in place for now in classrooms? Classes are the one place on campus where students and faculty have no choice but to go and spend extended time in enclosed spaces. Because in-person learning is so important, it makes sense that we focus our highest mitigation levels in classrooms. Also, we have community members with family or other considerations who remain concerned about exposure. While we hope conditions continue to improve and we can soon take further steps, we feel for now this is the right balance for our community. We want to take this step now rather than remove the mandate entirely but have to wait longer to do so.

May individuals continue masking? Faculty, staff and students who wish to continue to wear face-coverings are encouraged to do so. Like every sector of society, Longwood is moving away from sweeping, population-level rules and towards a world where individuals manage their risk as they feel appropriate for their own circumstances. All community members should respect the choices

others make. Longwood continues to have a substantial supply of N95 masks available; you can request them by emailing safety@longwood.edu.

Is this change permanent? Public health conditions could in the future require us to adjust again. But we consider that all the more reason to adjust now when conditions allow.

When might the mandate regarding classrooms end? As noted above, we believe this step represents an appropriate balance for now. Further changes will depend on whether metrics like case numbers and positivity rates in our region continue to improve, as they have the last few weeks. We will review conditions again after spring break and over the course of the semester.

What about public areas of offices that serve the campus community and public? Masks are now optional in all indoor public areas. However, as noted above, if you attend a meeting in a private office, the host may ask you to wear a face-covering and you should do so.

What about academic classes in areas like music and performing arts, where alternate mitigations are already in place? We believe these have worked well. They should continue for now.

Are there any places where the rules are different? While we hope it won't be necessary, Longwood may announce or temporarily impose requirements for specific locations or events. Masks will continue to be required at the University Health Center. As with the rest of campus, masks are now optional for those using the Health and Fitness Center.

Throughout the trial of Covid-19, Longwood's community has truly shown through, and made it possible to reach this milestone. As spring approaches, there is much to celebrate on campus. We thank you all.

Matthew McWilliams
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