

Updated Guidelines for Vehicle Occupancy and Research Safety (8/19/21)

To mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 and the challenges of the Delta variant, Virginia Tech will align with the updated [CDC recommendations](#) for face masks.

Based on the CDC guidance, the Virginia Tech guidelines for research activities and vehicle occupancy during the COVID-19 pandemic have been updated.

The following tables provide pandemic guidance on vehicle occupancy (Table 1) and research activities (Table 2). Table 3 is included as a quick reference guide to activities and face mask/distancing requirements for vaccinated/unvaccinated individuals.

Table 1. Updated Guidance (8/19/2021) on Pandemic Vehicle Occupancy

One or more occupants are NOT fully vaccinated		All occupants are fully vaccinated	
Passenger Vehicle	When there are two or more passengers, vehicle occupants must wear a face mask at all times while in the vehicle.	When there are two or more passengers, vehicle occupants must wear a face mask at all times while in the vehicle.	
	In passenger cars, no more than two riders are recommended (driver and one person in the rear).	80 percent of seating capacity may be occupied if all occupants are fully vaccinated. Maintain spacing when possible.	
	In any vehicle, no one should sit directly behind anyone or in the same row, but rather sit diagonally to maximize physical distancing.	80 percent of seating capacity may be occupied if all occupants are fully vaccinated. Maintain spacing when possible.	
	Each traveler should be assigned a specific seat. Maintaining the same driver and passenger seat assignments will decrease the need for cleaning.	It is still recommended that travelers use the same seat while traveling to and from a destination.	
	Alternate seating positions will help maximize physical distance between vehicle occupants with a maximum of one person per row; for instance, a 4-door vehicle with two rows of seating (sedan or 5-to-6 passenger SUV) can have one driver and one passenger.	80 percent of seating capacity may be occupied if all occupants are fully vaccinated. Maintain spacing when possible.	
12-passenger van and larger	Follow all recommendations listed above.	Follow all recommendations listed above.	
	One person per seat and alternating sides.	80 percent of seats may be used, but maintain spacing when possible.	
	Researchers participating in field work should be assigned to a specific travel group and remain in that travel group for the duration of the work season/semester, to minimize potential transmission to others participating in the same field research project.	Continue to minimize interactions through the use of functionally-related groups.	

The following guidelines are recommended to minimize the potential for transmission of SARS-CoV-2 while traveling within a vehicle with a group or other individuals:

- The driver of the vehicle is responsible for cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces inside and outside the vehicle.
- High-touch surfaces include exterior and interior door handles and grips, interior door and window controls, arm rests, safety belts, cup holders, glove/storage compartment latches, air vents, gear shift, center console (climate/audio controls), steering wheel, visors, and rear-view mirror.
- Clean surfaces before and after use and when occupants change position.
- Maximize the movement of air within the vehicle using a combination of the vehicle's climate control system and windows so that each passenger is supplied with fresh, un-recirculated air. The best and safest way to do this is to open the window opposite from where you are sitting. For example, if there are two people in a sedan (one in the front driver seat and the other in the rear passenger seat), you would open the front passenger window and rear driver window.

Table 2. Updated Guidance (8/19/2021) for Research Activities

	Updated Guidance for non-Vaccinated Individuals	Updated Guidance for Fully Vaccinated Individuals
Student Research	All approved undergraduate paid and for-credit research and instruction may be in person, provided appropriate approvals and protocols are in place (i.e., face masks and PPE use, distancing rules, lab hygiene, Institutional Research Board approvals, etc.).	All approved undergraduate paid and for-credit research and instruction may be in person, provided appropriate approvals and protocols are in place (i.e., PPE use, lab hygiene, IRB approvals, etc.). Research lab “pods” of a small number (10 or less) of fully vaccinated individuals may work together without distancing (e.g., 4 fully vaccinated individuals may be able to do benchwork in the same space where only 2 non-vaccinated individuals would be able to work). At this time face masks are still recommended when working indoors with others, and are required when indoors in public spaces.
	All graduate for-credit instruction and research may be in person provided appropriate approvals and protocols are in place (including face masks and/or PPE use, distancing rules, lab hygiene, etc.). This includes students participating in project/thesis/dissertation work and paid graduate student workers.	All graduate for-credit instruction and research may be in person provided appropriate approvals and protocols are in place (i.e., PPE use, lab hygiene, IRB approvals, etc.). This includes students participating in project/thesis/dissertation work and paid graduate student workers. Research lab “pods” of a small number (10 or less) of fully vaccinated individuals may work together without distancing (e.g., 4 fully vaccinated individuals may be able to do benchwork in the same space where only 2 non-vaccinated individuals would be able to work). At this time face masks are still recommended when working indoors with others, and are required when indoors in public spaces.
	All volunteer work should follow the same requirements as for-credit work.	All volunteer work should follow the same requirements as for-credit work.
	Any exceptions should be approved by the appropriate college dean or institute director or her/his designee.	If anyone needing to work in the laboratory setting with others is not fully vaccinated, the entire group must follow non-Vaccinated protocols (column 1).
Research Laboratory Safety Considerations	The consumption of food and drink is prohibited in certain types of labs as outlined in <i>Environmental Health and Safety’s</i> Chemical Hygiene Plan as well as the University Biosafety Manual. However, the removal of masks to eat in laboratories and research spaces is strongly discouraged, even when normally permitted.	The consumption of food and drink is prohibited in certain types of labs as outlined in <i>Environmental Health and Safety’s</i> Chemical Hygiene Plan as well as the University Biosafety Manual. If normally permitted to eat/drink in a laboratory setting, fully vaccinated individuals may follow the original rules as outlined. This requires all individuals within the space are fully vaccinated.
	Each researcher is responsible for following the proper safety requirements and respecting the safety of others. In order to reduce risks, there must be a strong partnership between researchers and university administration.	There exists a collective responsibility to maintain the safety of all researchers, participants, and others involved in or exposed to the research activity. Individually, each researcher must hold themselves and others accountable for laboratory safety to include proper behavior relative to COVID-19 mitigations strategies.
	Additional research can be performed in laboratories with appropriate use of PPE, with continued strict adherence to safety/hygiene and physical distancing requirements.	Additional research can be performed in laboratories with appropriate use of PPE, with continued strict adherence to safety/hygiene requirements.

	Research must be conducted using the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and maintaining proper safety and physical distancing requirements.	Research oriented PPE must always be adhered to, even for fully vaccinated individuals. Conducting research safely includes primary mitigation to the highest hazard, which is often not COVID-19 in the laboratory and field setting. Fully vaccinated individuals must always adhere to all safety requirements while conducting research.
General (COVID-19) Guidance for Researchers	Researchers are encouraged to telework whenever possible.	<p>Researchers are encouraged to resume in-person research to the extent possible. In particular, laboratory and field research for those fully vaccinated may resume relatively normal activities while following all current COVID-19 mitigation strategies and protocols.</p> <p>Research with human subjects is allowed as permitted by the IRB and requires completion and approval of the COVID-19 Resumption of In-person Research Requirements Template. In-person research with human subjects will be carefully considered to ensure that appropriate protocols are in place to protect the safety of subjects and staff.</p>
	Research conducted in labs must have approval from the appropriate lab manager and principal investigator(s).	Research conducted in labs must have approval from the appropriate lab manager and principal investigator(s).
	Individuals who are at high risk (existing medical condition, age, recent potential exposure, including travel to a high-risk zone, possible COVID-19 symptoms, or cohabitating with someone in one of these categories) may choose to not work in the lab. For those that have these concerns, they should contact the Division of Human Resources.	Fully vaccinated individuals may have other risk factors requiring accommodations, which may include continuing to wear a face mask and distancing themselves from others. Known only to those researchers, they have the responsibility to work with the appropriate resources (e.g., HR, OEA) to determine the best course of action.
	Research with human subjects is allowed as permitted by the IRB and requires completion and approval of the COVID-19 Resumption of In-person Research Requirements Template. In-person research with human subjects will be carefully considered to ensure that appropriate protocols are in place to protect the safety of subjects and staff.	Research with human subjects is allowed as permitted by the IRB and requires completion and approval of the COVID-19 Resumption of In-person Research Requirements Template. In-person research with human subjects will be carefully considered to ensure that appropriate protocols are in place to protect the safety of subjects and staff.

Table 3. Quick reference for masking during Virginia Tech activities according to vaccination status.

“Combined” refers to at least one unvaccinated individual involved.

Possible Scenario	Allowed if Not Vaccinated?	Allowed if Vaccinated?	Allowed if Combined? (Vaccinated/non-Vaccinated)
Masks off indoors in public spaces	No	No	No
Masks off in vehicles	No	No	No
Masks off in private office suites	No	Yes	No
Masks off in cubicles with physical distancing	No	Yes	No
Masks off, no physical distancing indoors	No	No	No
Masks off, no physical distancing in vehicles	No	No	No
Masks off, no physical distancing in office suites	No	Yes	No
Masks off, no physical distancing in cubicles	No	No	No
Masks off outdoors, no physical distancing	No	No	No
Masks off outdoors with physical distancing	Yes	Yes	Yes
Masks off in classrooms, lecture halls, assembly halls	No	No	No
Masks off in meeting rooms, conference rooms with physical distancing	No	Yes	No
No physical distancing in classrooms, lecture halls, assembly halls	No	No	No
No physical distancing in meeting rooms, conference rooms	No	No	No
Masks off for outdoors operations (working)	No	Yes	No

Note:

An individual is considered fully vaccinated, 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen vaccine.