

**Alberta Post-Secondary Sector
COVID-19 Fall '21 Return to Campus
Planning Context, Assumptions and Guidance
Document**

DRAFT V 1.13

May 27, 2021

Approved by:

Alberta Health with the support of Advanced Education and the Council of Post-Secondary Presidents of Alberta

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To be developed

Background

With the continued rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, Alberta post-secondary institutions are developing their “return to campus” plans for Fall ‘21. With the support of the Council of Post-Secondary Presidents of Alberta (COPPOA) and input from Advanced Education, this document provides Alberta Health’s planning context, assumptions and guidance to support post-secondary institution fall planning.

This document is designed as a tool with high-level guidance to support detailed planning at each Alberta college, polytechnic and university in support of the safe return of students, staff, faculty and the public to campuses.

The following assumptions and guidance has been developed at a point in time, based on the best information and science available. It is incumbent on each institution to update and revise their return to campus plans as more information becomes available from government sources, including public health orders from the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), and directions from Advanced Education and federal authorities.

Planning Context and Assumptions

Context

The science, research and understanding of COVID-19, the development of new variants and efficacies of vaccines continues to evolve. The challenge that we all face is planning for what the reality of the global pandemic will be in Fall ‘21 during a period in which we are continuing to see relatively high levels of public health measures, infection rates and hospitalizations. What is paramount in the planning process is the health and well-being of campus communities, while recognizing the importance of welcoming students, staff, and faculty members, locally and globally, back to campuses and the need to adapt as the situation evolves.

Based on the ongoing guidance from Public Health officials and experience from multiple jurisdictions, controlled environments such as post-secondary institutions have proven to be lower-risk sites for the transmission of COVID-19. The multiple measures that have been put in place and refined over the last year or so, have assisted post-secondary institutions remain open at varying levels while minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

While the elimination of the COVID-19 virus in the short-term is unlikely, we can adapt to living with and managing the virus as we do with other seasonal illnesses such as influenza. The high uptake of immunizations and exposure reduction control measures will provide the tools to make everyone less vulnerable to getting COVID-19 or experiencing serious health outcomes. Overall, by the end of the summer, we anticipate that COVID-19 transmission will be low, and more importantly serious infections and health outcomes will be uncommon as the approved vaccines are highly effective.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 requires everyone to do their part, including immunization, personal daily health checks, staying home when unwell, wearing masks when appropriate, practicing good hand hygiene and maintaining strong public health measures such as monitoring, testing and contact tracing.

Assumptions

As conditions improve throughout the summer, it is reasonable to expect that some of the more restrictive public health measures will be relaxed as outlined in "[Alberta's Open For Summer Plan](#)". As a result of the anticipated uptake and positive outcomes of our immunization roll out, evolving public health measures and the tailoring of prevention and control measures, physical distancing and gathering limits will not be in-place in controlled post-secondary classrooms, laboratories and other instructional and academic support settings.

The following assumptions are being made at this time relative to September 2021:

- ⇒ Vaccinations will continue to be rolled out with all those over 12 years of age having an opportunity to receive a first dose by July 1, 2021 and with the goal of XX percentage of the population aged 12+ having had a second dose of vaccine by August 31, 2021.
- ⇒ Vaccinations will continue to be the most effective measure in mitigating the effects of COVID-19.
- ⇒ The majority of provincial public health measures have been lifted (physical distancing will not be required, gathering restrictions that affect classrooms, laboratories, academic libraries, etc will be lifted).
- ⇒ Larger group gatherings will again be allowed based on changing public health restrictions.
- ⇒ Quarantine requirements (including what constitutes a close contact) will be reduced as vaccination levels increase. Once an individual has received a second dose and its efficacy is at its maximum (14 days post the second dose), quarantining will not be required.
- ⇒ Entry requirements into Canada may vary depending on the country of origin.
- ⇒ Travel restrictions entering other countries may vary by country.

Public Health Measures

Although vaccinations will continue to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, it is expected that the virus will continue to be present and will need to be managed on an ongoing basis. Rapid screening and other measures may be used to monitor for cases of COVID-19 and the continuation of remaining public health measures will continue to be an important tool in managing the impacts of COVID-19. The ability to manage the ongoing presence of the virus is a shared responsibility and depends on a high level of vaccination rates along with ongoing compliance with core public health measures, which may include:

- ⇒ Completing a [daily COVID-19 self-assessment](#) and not attending campus when ill/exhibiting symptoms.
- ⇒ Maintaining high quality handwashing and hygiene protocols.
- ⇒ Maintaining up to date institutional/campus COVID-19 Safety Plans.
- ⇒ Continuing with cleaning protocols on all indoor high touch surfaces and washrooms.
- ⇒ Wearing non-medical masks when required in indoor common areas depending on isolated transmission events of COVID-19
- ⇒ Adapting to potential short-term closures of programs/activities in response to a surge of cases.

The federal government may maintain certain public health measures for individuals entering Canada. Post-secondary institutions will need to have plans in place to support students and staff coming into the country including any testing, quarantining and reporting requirements and support to assist them obtaining vaccinations as needed in Alberta.

General Planning Guidelines

Educational Activities

The vast majority of students, both international and domestic, are looking forward to returning to our campuses and engaging in the full learning, living and student experiences associated with a post-secondary education. Educational activities encompass all elements offered that deliver and/or support student learning and development. They also include those structured in classrooms, lecture theatres, libraries, studios, workshops, labs, field schools, practicums, performances or research settings as well as informal activities that support teaching, learning, research, student experience and development.

Planning for educational activities should consider the following:

- ⇒ There will be no health restrictions that limit the number of participants that would normally be allowed in a learning environment. (e.g. all seats can be occupied in a classroom/lecture theatre or all stations/benches can be occupied in a lab or studio setting).

- ⇒ Field learning/research activity can occur with normal health and safety practices in place associated with the hazards of that field learning or research activity.
- ⇒ Drama/musical/fine arts/education/physical education practices, studios and performances can resume in full with public attendance at performances subject to any public health measures.
- ⇒ Practicums, co-operatives and clinical placements may resume subject to any guidelines required by the receiving organization/employer.
- ⇒ Educational, research and business travel abroad/exchange programs can take place subject to the normal hazard assessment associated with the destination and compliance with any travel restrictions/public health measures required by Canada or the destination(s).

Research Activities

For a number of post-secondary institutions, research is a fundamental aspect of their mission and is a major economic driver within the institution, the local community and province. Restoring research to pre-pandemic levels is a vital aspect of Fall '21 planning. Planning for research activity should consider the following:

- ⇒ There will be no health restrictions that limit the number of participants that would normally be allowed in a research lab or facility.
- ⇒ Field research may resume subject to the normal hazard assessment associated with the research activity and in compliance with any travel restrictions/public health measures required by the local authority/destination country.
- ⇒ Any clinical trials that may have been suspended can resume in compliance with any public health measures that may be implemented by any partnering organization.
- ⇒ Research exchanges/collaborations may continue in compliance with any travel restrictions/public health measures required by Canada or the destination country.

Student Services, Supports and Residence Operations

Student Services and Supports

Student services and supports are an integral component of the student experience. Planning should consider the following:

- ⇒ Orientation to the institution and any specific requirements/constraints that may be in place.
- ⇒ Institutions are encouraged to consider their academic accommodation mechanisms to support students who may not be able to travel and who may be immunocompromised.
- ⇒ Student mental health is an ongoing concern even more so in the context of the pandemic and current economic conditions. Institutions should ensure they communicate the supports available to address the evolving needs of students as they return to campuses.

Residence Operations

Many of our institutions have residence and food service operations that are actively awaiting a return of students to campuses. In ramping up residence and food service operations the following should be considered:

- ⇒ Institutions should plan for close to full occupancy within residences, including the potential for shared accommodation and full use of communal washrooms.
- ⇒ Institutions should consider setting aside a percentage of rooms for isolation purposes to house those international students entering residence programs who must meet quarantine requirements (should those measures continue) as well as students who may have to isolate during the academic term.
- ⇒ Campus retail food services and student dining operations can expect to operate under normal conditions.

Athletics, Intramurals, Clubs and Activities

Athletics, intramurals, clubs and other student activities form an integral element of the student experience. It is expected that these activities will resume during the upcoming academic term.

- ⇒ Many student athletic programs are overseen or regulated by a national/provincial/regional body. Each athletic program will need to work with their respective body to assess any public health measures or programming changes that are being implemented by that body.
- ⇒ There will be a resumption of all student intramural programs.
- ⇒ Student clubs/sports clubs can return to full operations.
- ⇒ Any large student activity such as a student association lead orientation or large social event should be planned, approved and coordinated with the development of a specific COVID-19 safety plan that is applicable to the nature, size and location of the activity and within the specific constraints of the individual institutions.

Health and Safety

The health and safety of campuses is a shared responsibility and will require a series of controls for the foreseeable future. Although vaccinations provide the greatest opportunity for a full return to campus operations, other controls will be required.

- ⇒ Actively promote the benefits of being vaccinated not only to the individual but the benefits to their family, fellow students and colleagues and the broader community. International students are able to access vaccinations by calling AHS Health Link (811).
- ⇒ Institutions are encouraged to develop a return to campus health and safety awareness program for students, faculty and staff.

Our People

Staff, instructors and faculty are the most valuable resource at our post-secondary institutions and essential in delivering on each vision and mission and providing the highest quality learning experience for our students. Like students, some staff may feel uneasy about returning to campus or have circumstances that may impact their ability to return. Institutions should:

- ⇒ Communicate to employees the steps the institution is taking to provide a safe and healthy work environment.
- ⇒ Ensure policies and procedures are in place that enable an institution to assess the particular circumstances of an employee and in accordance with legal obligations and collective agreements, and implement appropriate accommodations **if warranted**.
- ⇒ Prepare for increased absences due to self-isolation or quarantine requirements.
- ⇒ Ensure employees are provided up to 3 hours of time off with pay to be vaccinated, as needed, in accordance with Employment Standards.
- ⇒ Consider flexible hours and remote working options (full or partial) for employees if it can be accommodated within the institution's operational requirements while providing the best learning and working experience for students and the institution's community.
- ⇒ Ensure employees are aware of mental health supports or other employee assistance programs that are available to support a return to in-person activities.

Communications

As institutions prepare for the fall term, ongoing and timely communication to campus communities will be essential for a successful return. In developing communications strategies and activities, you should consider:

- ⇒ A web presence for all COVID-19 related information for your institution.
- ⇒ Engagement and updates to key constituent groups.
- ⇒ Timely communication on any outbreaks/transmissions on a campus and what steps the institution is taking in response.
- ⇒ Regular communications on any changes to public health measures and how that may impact campus operations.