

POLICY TITLE

Wellness First: Comprehensive Health Clearance Guidelines for UNC CH MHSPAS Students

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Purpose & Scope:

This policy establishes a comprehensive framework for health clearance protocols tailored to students in UNC's PA program, spanning both pre-clinical and clinical phases. It standardizes procedures beyond COVID-19, emphasizing preventive measures and guidance for respiratory symptoms, positive tests for known respiratory viral infections, and exposure incidents. Acknowledging the pandemic's fluid nature, it prioritizes adaptable protocols. Effective since its introduction, adherence is mandatory, with non-compliance viewed as unprofessional conduct and subject to disciplinary action. The policy's scope covers diverse health clearance procedures, including preventive strategies, symptomatic guidelines, and response protocols for respiratory infections including but not limited to COVID-19. It addresses various health scenarios affecting student participation, highlighting the need for flexible, adaptive protocols amid evolving public health contexts.

ARC-PA STANDARD ADDRESSED

A3.01: Program policies must apply to all students, principal faculty and the program director regardless of location.

A3.02: The program must define, publish, make readily available and consistently apply its policies and procedures to all students.

A3.08: The program must define, publish, make readily available and consistently apply policies addressing student exposure to infections and environmental hazards before students undertake any education activities which would place them at risk. Those policies must: (a) address methods of prevention, (b) address procedures for care and treatment after exposure, c) clearly define financial responsibility

RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND REVIEW CYCLE

This policy undergoes quarterly review by the division or as necessary, guided by input from the UNC Chapel Hill Campus Health Clinical Exposure Committee and UNC Chapel Hill Health Professions Committee.

DEFINITIONS

A contagious respiratory infection refers to an illness primarily affecting the respiratory system, caused by viruses or bacteria, capable of spreading from person to person through respiratory droplets. These infections often result in symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, difficulty breathing, and may include conditions like influenza, common colds, bronchitis, or pneumonia. They are characterized by their ability to transmit easily through close contact, respiratory secretions, or aerosols, posing a risk of widespread transmission in communities, institutions, or healthcare settings.

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV2 .

Methods of Prevention for Exposure to COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Pathogens

A. Mask Protection During Clinicals:

As of September 13, 2023, based on recent increases in COVID-19 cases and the positivity rate in the community, **starting Friday, Sept. 1, 2023** all teammates providing direct patient care at UNC Hospitals and its clinics, and at UNC Faculty Physicians clinics, will be required to wear a mask while providing direct patient care. Masks will remain strongly recommended for patients and visitors.

This means that all students must wear a mask when in any building affiliated with UNC Medical Center or Regional Campuses/sites.. Please remember this is a requirement, not a suggestion.

- o **Clinical experiences at Regional Campuses/sites:**

- If you are rotating out of UNC Health (for example at a regional campus) check in with the site education coordinator/UNC Chapel Hill MHSPAP Clinical Director to see if additional preparation is required.

B. Annual UNC Health LMS Training Modules:

All students enrolled in the UNC Chapel Hill MHSPAS Program are required to complete annual UNC Health LMS module on infection control for healthcare personnel.

C. Review the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) COVID-19 Homepage:

UNC Chapel Hill MHSPAS students should review the [CDC website](#) for up-to-date information about COVID-19, guidance, resources, and ways to slow the spread.

D. Review the UNC-Chapel Hill CV-19 Dashboard:

The [UNC-Chapel Hill COVID-19 Dashboard](#) helps the university track and analyze the impact of COVID-19 on the overall health of the campus community. and the ability to respond to change during these unprecedented times. The dashboard is frequently updated and pulls data from multiple sources to create a comprehensive illustration of health trends and operational capacities across campus, as well as stay updated on COVID-19 data relevant to campus, local and state communities.

- E. Frequently review the NCDHHS Respiratory Virus Summary North Carolina Dashboard:

The [North Carolina Respiratory Virus Summary Dashboard](#) tracks information about North Carolinians with contagious respiratory viruses that can cause cold symptoms or severe breathing problems, including COVID-19, the flu (Influenza), and RSV.

Procedure for Medical Care and Reporting Following Exposure to COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Pathogens

Exposure to non-COVID-19 Respiratory Pathogens

Exposure to communicable diseases will require vigilant self-monitoring for development of associated symptoms. For student and patient safety, students who have been exposed to a contagious disease or are ill with symptoms of communicable or contagious diseases may need to avoid contact with patients. The student will require clearance from a healthcare provider to return to the classroom or clinical practice setting. Students who require evaluation of symptoms following exposure may have an initial evaluation by UNC for emergency services, UNC Campus Health, or occupational health. Students may also be evaluated by their own healthcare provider if preferred. Proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) following an exposure may be required. Use of PPE may include masking and/ or use of other protective equipment.

Students in the Clinical Phase must notify the Director of Clinical Education and clinical year team or the Program Director within 24 hours of the exposure event. Any exposure to a communicable disease resulting in an absence from Preclinical or Clinical Phase work requires student reporting to the UNC MHSPAS Preclinical or Clinical team (whichever is appropriate for the situation).

Exposure to COVID-19

What to do if you have an exposure to COVID-19:

If you are exposed to COVID-19, whether at home, in the community, in class, in a clinical setting, or at work, you must be extra-vigilant about self-monitoring and use PPE properly for a period of time after exposure. Follow [CDC guidelines](#) for quarantine* and testing following exposure. If you notice any symptoms during this time, even if very mild, you must immediately self-isolate and follow the instructions above for symptoms.

If you have been fully vaccinated and boosted (if eligible), you may continue normal activities as long as asymptomatic.

See the flow chart at the bottom the page for additional guidance.

*Your recommended length of quarantine may vary if you are in a clinical rotation. Please communicate with your clinical coordinator, preceptor, and/or the Occupational Health Service at your assigned facility regarding return to clinicals.

What to do if you have possible SYMPTOMS of COVID-19:

All students are required to self-monitor for symptoms on a daily basis:

- Do you have **new muscle aches** not related to another medical condition or another specific activity (e.g. due to physical exercise)?
- Do you feel like you may have a **temperature of greater than 100.0°F**?
- Do you have **sore throat, runny nose and/or congestion** not related to another medical condition (e.g. allergies)?
- Do you have a **new or worsening cough** that is not related to another medical condition?
- Do you have **shortness of breath** that is not attributable to another medical condition?
- Do you have **recent (<5 days) loss of smell and taste**?
- Do you have new onset of **vomiting or diarrhea** not related to another medical condition?

If you answer yes to any of the questions above, immediately self-isolate and complete a Covid test, either at-home or via PCR through Campus Health. Students who are symptomatic must be tested for COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.

Follow [Campus Health instructions](#) for testing. You may not attend class or clinical rotations until your COVID test results come back.

- **If your PCR test result is NEGATIVE**, you may return to classes or the healthcare setting (i.e., clinical rotations) once your symptoms resolve/improve. You must be fever-free without antipyretics (fever-reducing medicines such as Tylenol) for at least 24 hours, AND you must have had no diarrhea or vomiting for at least 48 hours, regardless of the cause.
 - Return to class or clinicals may be allowed without full resolution of all symptoms (e.g., cough) so long as those symptoms are improving, and your test is negative.
 - Call Campus Health or consult with your clinical coordinator/preceptor/facility Occ Health if unsure about whether return is permitted.
- **If your test result is POSITIVE**, you will be required to isolate. Follow the instructions below for positive tests.

What to do if you have a POSITIVE COVID-19 test:

If you have a positive test result at any time, regardless of vaccination status, whether or not you have symptoms, and regardless of where the test was performed, immediately self-isolate.

Day 0 of isolation is defined as the day of symptom onset, regardless of when you tested positive.

Day 1 is defined as the first full day after your symptoms started.

A positive test requires you to stay home and isolate for Days 1-5 following the onset of symptoms. If your symptoms are improving, you may return to class on Day 6, and you must remain masked for Days 6-10.

Please review all three links below in detail

[CDC guidance: What to do if you are sick](#)

[Isolation calculator and instructions/ precautions \(CDC\)](#)

[CDC guidance: COVID-19 Testing \(includes test types and interpretation\)](#)

**Please note that these instructions are written based on guidance for the general public. Healthcare facilities must simultaneously balance the need for adequate staff with the priority to protect vulnerable patients. Because of this, your length of isolation may vary if you are in clinical rotation and may not be the same as the return to campus guidance. Please communicate with your clinical coordinator, preceptor, and/or the Occupational Health Service at your assigned facility regarding return to clinicals.*

Health Clearance Protocol for Health Professions Students

Please note that as the COVID pandemic evolves, all guidance and protocols are subject to change. This protocol is effective as of August 1, 2023. Failure to follow this protocol is a deficiency in professional behavior and may be cause for disciplinary action. For additional information, please reference the [UNC School of Medicine Health Clearance Protocol](#).

Initial and subsequent care and follow-up activities, including recommendations related to counseling, prophylactic or treatment regimens and continued or restricted activities following a student's exposure, illness or injury will be determined by the student's healthcare provider, in collaboration with the student and other appropriate healthcare professionals.

In the event the student requires reasonable accommodations as a result of the exposure, illness or injury, every effort will be made by the program to do so.



Please see the Health Clearance for Health Professions Students flow chart below for instructions on return to the classroom or clinical setting.

Financial Responsibility for Care and Treatment

COVID-19 rapid antigen test is available for free at both campus pharmacies for all UNC MHSPAS students (1 per student). These tests are also available for purchase. COVID-19 PCR is available at Campus Health with scheduled appointment (<https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/primary-care/covid-19-service-details-and-faqs>). Charges conferred by laboratory testing at Campus Health will be billed to the student's health insurance policy.

PUBLISHED

UNC PA Program Policies and Procedures web page

UNC PA Program Student Handbook

HISTORY OF APPROVAL AND UPDATES

Approved by Policy Review Committee 22 December 2023.

Approved by Program Director 22 December 2023.

Last Updated 22 December 2023.