



United University Professions – Guidelines for Reopening Assuring a Safe Working Environment during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Reopening Begins:

Re-opening of New York has begun. The process – called New York Forward – is occurring in four phases. In each phase, certain economic activities may reopen in regions of the state that meet identified criteria for re-opening. During each phase, employers engaged in permitted activities may choose to bring workers back to the worksite pursuant to plans the employer must develop in compliance with state infection control guidance for the activity. The Governor’s plan is available here: [NY Forward](#).

Governor Cuomo has announced that public sector employers will follow the same standards for reopening as private sector businesses. As a result, each SUNY campus may begin to bring employees back to campus who have duties consistent with the permitted activities in each phase in the region where the campus is located.

To assure that our members’ health and safety is protected, it is critical that these plans be developed carefully, and that union representation be included in the planning process. By working together, we can help to address the legitimate health and safety concerns our members have about returning to campus.

To quote Southern New Hampshire University President Paul LeBlanc: “If you were to design a place to make sure that everyone gets the virus, it would look like a nursing home or a campus.” We have witnessed what has occurred in nursing homes across the country. We need to ensure our campuses are not next.

Our members, our families, our students, and our communities must be protected:

While SUNY campuses may have the option to bring employees back to work on-campus, **they are not compelled to do so**. The lives of our members, our students, our patients, and our communities depend on thoughtful and careful planning which prioritizes safety. Poorly planned reopening which does not protect our members’ health and safety to the greatest extent possible **will result in outbreaks**. We cannot let that happen.

To assure that the health and safety of all members of the campus community are protected, the following principles must guide the reopening of our campuses. These principles are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all options available to protect our members from COVID-19 exposure on the job. Campus-specific return to work plans will vary as different campuses will need to address different issues with reopening. However, we do consider the principles outlined below to be core issues which must be addressed as SUNY campuses re-open.

Maximize Social Distancing:

Maximizing and maintaining social distancing is critical. The most effective way of accomplishing that is to continue to allow employees to work from home to the greatest extent possible. While campuses may need to bring certain essential employees back to campus, the reopening process does **not** compel campuses to bring employees back to campus whose presence on campus is not critical to performing their professional obligations. Until either a vaccine or an effective medical treatment is widely available, it is imperative that campuses maximize social distancing on campus.

- The telecommuting agreement between NYS and UUP has been extended through July 18, 2020. At least until then, employees must be permitted to continue to telecommute to the greatest extent possible.
- To best support planning for how work can be safely performed without unnecessary disruption through the fall semester, the telecommuting agreement must be extended, at least through the end of December 2020. UUP is committed to pressing for this at the state level.
- As employees begin to return to campus, telecommuting must continue to be extensively used, whether on a full-time or part-time basis, as it is the best tool available for reducing employee density and maintaining social distancing on campus.
- All employees who wish to continue to telecommute, whether on a full-time or part-time basis, should be allowed to do so to the greatest extent possible.
- Employees who self-identify as high-risk, who have high-risk family members at home, or who continue to have childcare issues due to COVID-19 related school, childcare and summer camp closures must be allowed to telecommute for their existing work obligations or be provided with alternate assignments which allow them to work from home.
- Staggered and/or compressed work obligation options to assist with reducing employee density at the work site should be developed jointly with UUP chapter representatives and offered to employees on a voluntary basis.
- Department, unit, office meetings should continue to be held virtually, both to include employees who are telecommuting or on staggered or compressed work obligations and to maximize social distancing among employees who are working on campus.
- Student and visitor access policies should be developed to reduce density and maintain social distancing. Such policies should address such things as:
 - Screening visitors for COVID-19 exposure, positive test results, or symptoms before allowing access.
 - Limiting physical access to scheduled appointments.
 - Designating an intake/reception/meeting room for appointments so staff do not have to use offices or personal workspaces.
 - Replacing in person appointments with tele-appointments to the extent possible.

- Many of our work areas are also areas where students congregate, study and live. These include but are not limited to residence halls, cafeterias, libraries, and gyms. It is critical that enforceable policies regarding student access to and use of these facilities be established to maintain social distancing. These include but are not limited to:
 - Closing common areas to the extent possible.
 - Limiting residence hall access to residents of the hall. Access by non-residents including other students, outside guests, non-residential staff, and others must be prohibited.
 - Limiting the number of individuals dining in cafeterias or using libraries or athletic facilities at any one time to maintain social distancing.

Test, Trace, Isolate:

The key to reducing the possibility of recurring outbreaks among employees and students who are working and studying on campus is widespread rapid testing, aggressive contact tracing, and isolation of COVID-19 positive individuals and their contacts.

- All employees should receive diagnostic tests immediately prior to returning to campus. Only employees who test negative should be brought back to work on campus. Employees who test positive should remain at home without charge to accruals until they test negative. Procedures for and timing of such testing shall be developed jointly with UUP representatives.
- All students coming to campus should receive diagnostic testing immediately prior to returning to campus. Only students who test negative should be allowed on campus. Students who test positive should remain at home until they test negative.
- A plan for conducting surveillance testing of employees and students who have returned to campus to monitor for infection should be developed jointly with UUP representatives. An increase in the infection rate should trigger broader testing of all employees and students on campus.
- On demand, rapid result, diagnostic testing of employees and students should be available on campus.
- Employees working on campus should self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms daily, not report to work, or leave work as soon as symptoms appear, and obtain testing as soon as possible thereafter.
- Employees who have COVID 19 symptoms or who test positive should remain at home without charge to accruals until they test negative. Employees with identified exposure to COVID-19 should remain at home without charge to accruals for the prescribed 14-day quarantine period.
- Students who are on campus who have COVID 19 symptoms or who test positive should be quarantined in housing which is physically separated from other students and residence halls.
- Plans for conducting on campus contact tracing which is designed to preserve confidentiality while rapidly identifying co-workers and students who have had contact with a COVID-19 individual should be developed jointly with UUP.

PPE- It's Not Just for Health Care Workers:

While medical grade Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is critical for health care workers, other employees also need PPE appropriate for their work location and duties. Ready access to appropriate PPE is critical, in combination with social distancing and aggressive testing and tracing, to protect our co-workers, our students and ourselves.

Governor Cuomo has directed that both public and private employers must provide face coverings to all employees who have direct contact with the public (including but not limited to customers and clients). There should be no question that this direction includes contact with students. However, employees returning to campus may also have direct contact with co-workers and should be protected from exposure at work (regardless of the source) to the greatest extent possible. To assure this occurs, face coverings and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) should be supplied to all employees, without cost to the employee.

- Face coverings (cloth coverings or surgical masks) should be supplied to all employees and students on campus. Appropriate face coverings should be worn by all employees and students at any time they might come into direct contact with other individuals on campus.
- Gloves should be provided to employees engaged in activities such as mail handling and receiving, custodial work, or activities that require regular contact with high touch surfaces.
- Depending on job duties, PPE appropriate to the activity may be required (e.g. lab work).
- N-95 respirators should be reserved for health care workers until supply chain issues have been resolved, unless N-95s are otherwise required by OSHA guidance or other applicable health and safety standards, to protect employees from other pathogens or environmental hazards.
- Sufficient medical grade PPE must be available to protect campus health care workers from potential COVID-19 exposure. See principles for health care workers below.
- Employees whose job duties require PPE should receive training in appropriate donning and doffing of PPE.
- Hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes with at least a concentration of 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol should be readily available and accessible to all employees throughout their work locations.

Arranging and Maintaining our Work Locations to Protect Health and Safety:

Protecting SUNY employees from COVID-19 exposure at work is also enhanced by: physical modifications of work areas to enhance social distancing, adjustment of HVAC systems to improve air quality, stepped up cleaning of work areas, and developing policies and protocols to limit access to students and other visitors to buildings, offices, and work areas. These actions should be taken before employees return to campus.

- All work areas must be evaluated for possible modifications to enhance social distancing. This could include such actions as:
 - modifying cubicle set up, shared offices arrangements, and conference room set up.
 - rearranging breakrooms, lunchrooms, and other common work areas to promote social distancing or limit access if this is not possible.
 - erecting plexiglass barriers in reception areas, at service counters, or in work areas where employees cannot be separated from each other or from students by at least six feet.

- HVAC systems should be evaluated and adjusted to maximize infection control potential. This could include but is not limited to such things as:
 - Increasing outdoor air ventilation.
 - Improving HVAC air filtration to the highest level achievable.
 - Running for longer hours per day (24/7 if possible).

- Cleaning schedules should be established to provide:
 - Closure for at least 24 hours and deep cleaning and disinfecting of workspaces and other areas used by COVID-19 positive employees or students.
 - Thorough cleaning and sanitizing of all workplaces daily.
 - More frequent cleaning of high touch areas such as restroom facilities, door handles, stair rails, elevator buttons, phones, copy machines, vending machines, water coolers, etc.

- Furniture in all common areas occupied by students including classrooms, residence hall common spaces, libraries, cafeterias, building lobbies, etc. should be rearranged or removed to promote social distancing and discourage casual congregation.

Communication is Key:

Protecting employee health and safety in the current crisis requires robust communication between management and UUP campus representatives and with the broader campus community.

- Campus risk assessments to identify risks for exposure and possible responses to address the risk should be jointly conducted by management and union representatives prior to finalizing any return-to-work plan.

- Draft campus return-to-work plans should be shared with UUP campus representatives for review and input prior to implementation. Certain aspects of these plans require negotiations with UUP representatives to implement. Beyond that, union input is critical for ensuring that employee concerns are addressed.

- Clear, transparent communication with campus employees is also critical. Campus employees need to know and understand that our and our students' health and safety is the campus's top priority.

And finally, our hospitals are our frontline:

The New York health care system was woefully unprepared for this pandemic. Critical shortages of personal protective equipment and diagnostic testing capacity place health care workers, including our members at the four SUNY academic medical centers and the Long Island Veterans Home, at incredible risk as they perform their jobs.

As we move forward, our hospitals and nursing home must be placed on sounder footing. While many of the principles discussed above are also applicable at the SUNY academic medical centers, our health care workers face additional risks associated with their work in health care settings which must be addressed.

- Our hospitals and nursing home must have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) to truly protect our members, our co-workers, our patients, and our families. This should include 90-day stockpiles of PPE sufficient to assure that:
 - New N-95 respirators are available for every patient care session with COVID-19 patients or persons under investigation (PUIs) as well as for employees who have contact with patients or the public throughout the hospital (replacements provided after every session with COVID 19 patients or PUIs or when the PPE is otherwise soiled or contaminated).
 - Other PPE (gowns, face shields, head coverings, booties, gloves) are available on all units with replacements provided after every patient care session with COVID-19 patients or PUIs or when the PPE is otherwise soiled or contaminated.
 - Surgical masks are provided to all patients, all visitors, and all hospital staff who have no contact with the public.
 - PPE designed for single use need not be “decontaminated” or “sterilized” and reused.
- Health care employees must be provided with all state and federal statutory COVID-19 related leave rights, as needed, without pressure to return to work until medically cleared for duty by their own physician or until appropriate childcare is available.
- At risk health care workers who self-identify should be assigned to alternate duties away from possible contact with COVID 19 patients, PUI’s, or the public.
- Staff treating COVID 19 patients or PUIs or who have contact with the public (e.g. ER reception) should be provided housing, if desired, at no expense to the staff member, to protect family members from possible infection.
- All patients admitted to the hospitals for elective procedures should be tested for COVID-19 within 24 hours prior to the admission.
- COVID-19 specific standard precautions (like universal precautions for blood borne pathogens) must be implemented for all units and procedures, including in operating rooms and for labor and delivery.
- Current restrictions on patient visitation must be maintained and actively enforced. We cannot return to unlimited open-door visitation policies.