

COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

What changes were made to the Healthy Washington plan on March 11?

On March 11, Gov. Inslee announced that the [Healthy Washington](#) plan would transition from a regional approach to a county-by-county evaluation process beginning March 22. Originally, all counties were placed in phase 3. However, on April 16, Cowlitz, Pierce and Whitman counties moved back to phase 2 because the counties failed both metrics for case counts and hospitalizations. Counties are [individually evaluated every three weeks](#) to determine whether they will remain in phase 3 or move back to an earlier phase.

Has the higher education proclamation been updated since October?

Not yet, but the Governor's Office and the Department of Health are working on an updated version. This FAQ reflects what we anticipate to see in the new proclamation. ([The proclamation dated Oct. 20, 2020 is still available here.](#)) We will update this FAQ as we receive new information.

What is the difference between Gov. Inslee's higher education proclamation and the Healthy Washington plan?

The higher education proclamation sets minimum protocols higher education institutions must follow to bring students safely back to campus. [The Healthy Washington plan](#) is a county-by-county phased plan for resuming social gatherings and reopening businesses and industries in Washington.

Do colleges have to follow both the higher education proclamation and the Healthy Washington plan?

Yes, colleges have to follow both the higher education proclamation and the Healthy Washington plan.

- Instructional activities (classrooms/labs) and student services are governed by the higher education proclamation.

- Social gatherings and non-instruction activities that have parallel activities out in the community fall under the [Healthy Washington plan](#) and the [business guidance attached to that plan](#).

Activity	Higher Ed Proclamation	Healthy Washington and business guidance
Instructional activities (classrooms/labs)	X	
Student services	X	
Computer labs	X	
Dining halls	X	X
Social gathering size limits		X
Libraries		X
Fitness centers		X
Venues (convention centers)		X
Student residence halls	X	X

What are colleges required to do under the higher education proclamation and the Healthy Washington plan?

Below is a summary of key mandates colleges and universities must follow under the higher education proclamation and the [Healthy Washington plan](#).

- Develop a safety plan and modify the plan as needed to keep up-to-date with COVID-19 safety requirements. Communicate the most recent version of the plan to students, faculty and staff and provide contact information for people to report complaints or violations.
- Post signs at entry points that let people know of their shared responsibilities to protect the campus community. Signs should address proper hygiene and sanitation, physical distancing, use of personal protective equipment, and staying home if feeling sick. The signs should include contact information for people who have concerns or questions.
- Require students, faculty and staff to self-certify that they have not experienced COVID-19 symptoms since their last visit to campus.
- Keep a log of people who come to campus, following state guidelines.
- Educate students, faculty and staff on how to detect symptoms and avoid high-risk situations.
- Limit or prohibit visitors to campus.
- Whenever possible, maintain six feet of physical distancing in busy areas like classrooms, hallways and common areas.
- If 6-foot distancing is not possible:
 - Implement engineering or administrative controls to minimize exposure.

- As appropriate or required, provide students, faculty and staff with personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, goggles or face shields. (Note: Gov. Inslee issued [a separate proclamation requiring all Washington residents to wear masks](#), including students.)
- Sanitize high-touch surfaces, and, where safe and applicable, use disposable gloves or other personal protective equipment to prevent transmission of the virus.
- Provide equipment and supplies for hand washing and cleaning, and develop policies around those needs.
- Identify available alternative arrangements for students and personnel upon requests or refusals to work due to concerns related to campus safety. Educate employees about COVID-19, including how to prevent transmission, and about leave benefits and policies.
- Develop response protocols for students, faculty and staff who have the virus, have been exposed to the virus, or who are showing symptoms of the virus. The protocols must require that students and personnel self-quarantine or isolate according to public health guidelines.
- **For colleges that operate student housing:**
 - Colleges must provide quarantine and isolation housing and services for people who live in college-operated housing and let them know about these options. Examples of support services are food and drink, basic supplies and internet access.
 - Colleges must assign a person to be on-site at all times to monitor compliance with the safety rules.
 - We will learn more about gathering-size limits in student housing once a new higher education proclamation is published. Until then, we advise colleges to follow the phase 2 guidance under [the Healthy Washington plan](#): up to five guests from outside a household, with a limit of two households. Phase 3 guidance allows for indoor gatherings of up to 10 people from outside a household, but all colleges should follow the more conservative phase 2 guidance until we hear otherwise.

The proclamation includes additional requirements for Greek housing and university-style dorms.

- **For campus food services:**
 - We anticipate the upcoming proclamation will align campus food services with [restaurant guidance under the Healthy Washington plan](#). Phase 2 guidance limits capacity at 25% with a maximum of six people per table from no more than two households. Phase 3 guidance limits capacity at 50% with a maximum of 10 people per table. (There are no household limits in phase 3.) We will update this FAQ if we hear otherwise.
 - Campus food services must also follow all the other health and safety protocols required of restaurants. Among other things, campus food services must require customers to wear face coverings when they're not eating or drinking, and ensure tables are either six feet apart or separated by a physical barrier.

Is Washington considering adopting the new CDC guidelines on 3-foot distancing in schools?

On March 25, Gov. Inslee announced that he would sign an executive order giving K-12 schools the option to reduce social distancing in the classroom from six feet to three feet, following [revised guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). He clarified, however, that no school district should use the 6-foot distance by summer and fall.

He also said middle and high school students who aren't in isolated "cohort" groups should still be placed at six feet apart in places where the number of people infected is still above 200 per 100,000 population. The order applies only to K-12 schools, so colleges must still enforce 6-foot distancing.

Are there limits to class sizes and labs?

No, classes are instructional, therefore, they fall solely under the higher education proclamation.

The proclamation places no size limits on classes or associated labs. However, classes and labs are subject to standard safety protocols, which include social distancing, cleaning, and use of masks or other personal protective equipment.

May we now reopen student services?

Yes, the Governor's Office has confirmed its intent to add student services to the next version of the higher education proclamation. Until then, colleges and universities may reopen student services immediately — without gathering-size limits — provided they enforce all the same health and safety protocols as instruction.

May we hold in-person commencement ceremonies?

Yes, colleges may hold in-person commencement ceremonies following [Department of Health guidelines](#) and the Healthy Washington plan's guidance for [miscellaneous venues](#) (for indoor ceremonies) or [spectator events](#) (for outdoor ceremonies). The Department of Health reminds colleges and universities that virtual ceremonies remain the safest way to celebrate.

Colleges in phase 3 counties may also hold walking commencement parades, following guidance for [fairs and special events](#).

May we give in-person tours inside buildings on campus?

Yes, colleges can offer in-person tours subject to the inside gathering size limits in the [Healthy Washington plan](#).

In phase 2, the indoor limit is five people from outside a household, with a limit of two households. The college representative counts as one household, so essentially this means a single college representative can give an inside tour for up to five people who all live together in a household.

In phase 3, the indoor limit is 10 people from outside a household. Again, the college representative counts as one household, so a single college representative can give an inside tour for up to 10 people from various households.

When are students, faculty and staff eligible for vaccines?

All Washingtonians age 16 and older [are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination](#).

Were on-campus technical high schools required to partially reopen on April 19?

Four of our technical colleges operate technical high schools on campus. We verified these high schools were exempt from the 30% in-person teaching requirement that took effect for standard high schools on April 19.

Can faculty/staff gather in small department meetings?

Faculty/staff meetings do not fall under the higher education proclamation because they do not provide direct instruction or service to students. The Governor's Office has confirmed it's appropriate for colleges to follow [library meeting room guidance](#) when planning department meetings. The limit for phase 2 is five people. The limit for phase three is 50% of the room's capacity, with no more than 10 people in the room.

What about travel?

The CDC has issued an [order requiring](#) all air passengers arriving to the US from a foreign country to get tested no more than three days before their flight departs and to provide proof of the negative result or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to the airline before boarding the flight.

On March 19, Gov. Inslee rescinded his recommended 14-day quarantine for interstate travel, in favor of [CDC guidance](#).

Can libraries reopen?

Yes, colleges should follow the [Healthy Washington plan's guidance for libraries](#). In phase 2, the occupancy limit is 25%. In phase 3, the occupancy limit is 50% or 400 people, whichever is less. For larger buildings that are 100,000 square feet or more, the phase 3 limit is 50% or 600 people, whichever is less.

In both phase 2 and phase 3, [there are limits to how many people can gather in a separate meeting room](#) within the library. The meeting room limit for phase 2 is five people. The meeting room limit for phase three is 50% of the room's capacity, with no more than 10 people in the room.

Libraries should continue to use no-contact methods for book returns. Any books returned in-person must be sealed, stored and quarantined for 24 hours.

Libraries must also develop detailed COVID-19 safety plans and follow other safety protocols, which include social distancing, cleaning, and use of masks or other personal protective equipment. Libraries must also eliminate choke points, reduce crowding and post signs about health and safety rules.

What about computer labs?

Computer labs are considered instructional spaces — even those housed in libraries. As such, they may remain open under the higher education proclamation and are not subject to gathering-size limits. (SBCTC recommends sectioning off computer labs in libraries to create a clear distinction between the two areas.)

Computer labs are subject to the other standard safety protocols, which include social distancing, cleaning, and use of masks or other personal protective equipment.

What about choir, band and orchestra?

In both phase 2 and phase 3, the [Healthy Washington plan](#) allows rehearsals, performances and recitals according to detailed safety and health protocols. Everyone who is not performing must wear a mask.

In phase 2, the maximum capacity of a space or venue is 25% or 200 people, whichever is less. Group sizes are limited to six people per group, and groups must be separated by six feet. There's a 20-foot distance requirement between performers and the audience. Performances and events are also limited to two hours.

In phase 3, the maximum capacity is 50% or 400 people, whichever is less. The capacity limit goes up to 600 people or 50% in venues larger than 100,000 square feet. Group sizes are limited to 10 people and two households per group, and groups must be separated by six feet. There's a 20-foot distance requirement between performers and the audience, but the distance shrinks to 10 feet if the performers are wearing masks.

Every discipline (dance, choir, orchestra etc.) also has a subset of discipline-specific requirements.

Performing arts centers may be rented to visiting groups, artists and musicians. However, venues must have a safety plan, inform patrons of the safety rules before they arrive, and post safety signs. Performers must follow all requirements associated with their activities — for example, an orchestra must follow the phased orchestra restrictions, and a choir must follow the phased choir restrictions. Trained staff or volunteers must be on-hand to encourage flow and physical distancing.

Are colleges required to limit social gathering sizes?

Yes, social gatherings are subject to gathering-size limits under the [Healthy Washington plan](#).

In phase 2, indoor gatherings are limited to five people from outside a household, with a limit of two households. Outdoor gatherings are limited to 15 people, with a limit of two households.

In phase 3, indoor gatherings are limited to 10 people from outside a household. Outdoor gatherings are limited to 50 people with no household limit.

May we rent out our conference center?

Colleges may rent out their conference centers provided they follow the [Healthy Washington plan's phased guidance](#) for miscellaneous venues.

In phase 2, the occupancy limit is 25 percent capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer (excluding staff). For retail events in large venues over 100,000 square feet, the capacity is capped at 300 people (including exhibitors but excluding staff).

In phase 3, the occupancy limit is 50% or 400 people, whichever is fewer (excluding staff). For venues that are more than 100,000 square feet, the capacity is capped at 600 people (including exhibitors but excluding staff.) There must be six feet of physical distance between groups/tables.

Weddings, funerals and religious services are also allowed but must follow the [restrictions related to those activities](#).

At least one COVID-19 program supervisor must be present during every event to make sure safety protocols are followed.

For performing arts centers, see the above question on choir, band and orchestra.

What are the rules for campus food services?

Please see page 3 for rules around campus food services.

Our college has a culinary-program restaurant for the public. Which protocols should we follow?

Several colleges operate culinary-program restaurants that are open to the public. The purpose of these programs is to give students real-life experience in a restaurant setting, therefore, these restaurants should follow Gov. Inslee's [Healthy Washington plan](#).

Our college offers personal services to the public. Which protocols should we follow?

Several colleges offer personal services — such as cosmetology, hairstyling or esthetician services — to the public as part of the hands-on training within their workforce programs. The purpose of these programs is to give students real-life experience in the personal-service setting, therefore, these services should follow the [guidelines for personal services under Gov. Inslee's Healthy Washington plan](#).

In phase 2, the plan limits client occupancy at 25% of occupancy limits staff, provided six feet of physical distancing can be maintained between stations. For phase 3, the occupancy limit bumps up to 50%.

In both phases, clients who have appointments should self-screen for signs and symptoms of COVID before arriving, and call, text or email the service-provider for instructions once they enter the building.

Walk-in customers are allowed, but they need to wait outside and call to see if any times are available and also answer questions about their health and possible COVID-19 exposure. Strict health and safety protocols apply in all cases.

What About Intercollegiate Athletics?

NWAC Washington member colleges participating in practice and/or competition must follow the [Healthy Washington](#) plan in conjunction with [NWAC Health and Safety Policies](#). NWAC Health and Safety Policies are in compliance with the Healthy Washington plan and are the primary source of information and direction for NWAC member colleges.

Per NWAC policy:

- There will be no tournaments for any NWAC sport until further notice.
- No overnight travel unless approved by presidents of each school participating and the NWAC office.

NWAC Washington member colleges may allow spectators to attend indoor and outdoor athletic competitions with capacity limits subject to the [Healthy Washington plan](#), county/local regulations and campus policies. The decision to have spectators attend or not attend NWAC competitions rests with each NWAC member institution. Member colleges should be fully aware of the State of Washington Activities Guidelines for indoor events. Fans must follow safety protocols posted at the venue.

Are There Limits for Campus Fitness Centers?

Campus fitness centers should follow Gov. Inslee's [Healthy Washington](#) plan for fitness and training.

In phase 2, the plan allows facilities to operate at 25% capacity or a maximum of 200 people, whichever is less. If the center is not staffed, only one person is allowed in each room, or up to four people from the same household. Visits must be scheduled in advance.

In phase 3, the plan allows facilities to operate at 50% capacity or a maximum of 400 people, whichever is lower. The capacity limit drops to 25% if the facility is not staffed.

The plan includes other detailed safety protocols, including requiring face coverings at all times and maintaining a minimum of six feet of physical distance.

Can Intercollegiate Teams Train/Work Out in Campus Fitness Centers?

NWAC member colleges may choose, at their own discretion, to open fitness centers for student athletes who are members of the athletic teams to train and condition, provided member colleges comply with the health and safety standards in the [Healthy Washington](#) plan and the [NWAC Health and Safety Policies](#).

Are temperature checks required before people come to campus?

Temperature checks are not required before people come to campus. The proclamation does, however, require colleges to have their students, faculty and staff self-certify that they have not experienced COVID-19 symptoms since their last campus visit. Some colleges are choosing to enforce temperature-checks either at home or on campus.

Where can I find more information?

COVID-19 safety rules

Visit the following websites for more COVID-19 safety information.

[Gov. Inslee's Healthy Washington Plan](https://bit.ly/3w4G43t): <https://bit.ly/3w4G43t>

[Higher education Proclamation 20-12.2](https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2) (latest version is Oct. 20, 2020 but a new version is underway): <https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2>

[Reopening guidance for businesses under Gov. Inslee's Healthy Washington plan](https://bit.ly/33dP2Pp): <https://bit.ly/33dP2Pp>

[Gov. Inslee's face mask requirement](https://bit.ly/3IRfsxV): <https://bit.ly/3IRfsxV>

[CDC guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting](https://bit.ly/31k5JYX): <https://bit.ly/31k5JYX>

- Also see CDC [Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education](https://bit.ly/3fnes3w), which can help your college establish cleaning protocols based on a low-medium-high risk assessment. <https://bit.ly/3fnes3w>

[COVID-19 – risk assessment dashboard \(shows phases and metrics by county\)](https://bit.ly/2BgiokK): <https://bit.ly/2BgiokK>

Requirements for colleges as employers

As employers, colleges must follow all of the employee safety rules that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic plus new requirements specific to COVID-19.

Begin by reviewing:

- The employee section of [higher education Proclamation 20-12.2](https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2): <https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2>
- [Gov. Inslee's Safe Start Plan](https://bit.ly/39IHMN1) for businesses and the general public (page 6): <https://bit.ly/39IHMN1>. The Safe Start Plan has been replaced by the [Healthy Washington](#) plan, however, the guidance on page 6 of the Safe Start plan still applies.

Then follow more specific guidance from the Department of Labor & Industries:

[Labor & Industries General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces](https://bit.ly/2VnWPFM): <https://bit.ly/2VnWPFM>

[Department of Health Workplace and Employer Resources and Recommendations](https://bit.ly/2VhEg6c): <https://bit.ly/2VhEg6c>

[Gov. Inslee's face mask requirement for employees](https://bit.ly/2YxGRuS): <https://bit.ly/2YxGRuS>

- [Clarification that employees should wear face masks – not shields](https://bit.ly/3k2aVXh) – unless they have a medical accommodation: <https://bit.ly/3k2aVXh>

[Labor & Industries guidance for employee masks. "Which Mask for Which Task?":](https://bit.ly/31nTn1N) <https://bit.ly/31nTn1N>

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements](https://bit.ly/32b9zn8): <https://bit.ly/32b9zn8>

[Labor & Industries risk-assessment guide for employers](https://bit.ly/3dBlyLZ): <https://bit.ly/3dBlyLZ>

- [Example risk assessment used by UW](https://bit.ly/2VIQ3k0): <https://bit.ly/2VIQ3k0>

Reopening guidance for state agencies:

The Office of Financial Management has published reopening guidance and protocols for state agencies, called [“Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery: Phased Reopening of Washington State Agencies.”](#) Colleges are not required to follow the protocols in this document, but may find some of the guidance helpful.

Also feel free to [email Carli Schiffner, SBCTC’s deputy executive director of education](mailto:cschiffner@sbctc.edu), at cschiffner@sbctc.edu