Medical Related Aspects of the Return to Work & Precautions

A Q&A with MIT Medical Director Dr. Cecilia Stuopis

This Q&A took place on August 4, 2021 as part of the School of Science’s Learn@Lunch series for staff members. Dr. Stuopis’s answers reflect the guidelines at that time. For the most up-to-date information about returning to campus, visit <now.mit.edu>.

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# Personal Protection

## How can I protect myself on public transportation?

* Masking is required on public transit, but that doesn’t ensure compliance
* Wear a well-fitting mask; consider double-masking
* Sit by the door for fresh air exchange
* Avoid people who are shouting or singing
* Consider using a surgical mask instead of a cloth mask since they tend to fit better

## Masks

### If we have our own office, should we close our door to remove our mask?

* Door must be closed to take off mask
* Mask must be on if door is open or if someone else is in office, regardless of distance

### Are masks required if someone is six feet away for less than ten minutes? If you have several short visits without masks, does it increase exposure?

All of those interactions require masks.

### What kind of mask is best?

* The key is a well-fitting mask without a lot of gaps on the side
* Covid store is up and running, so any area can order masks online

### Can we deny talking to visitors if they don’t wear a mask?

While we have the indoor mask policy, yes.

## Should desk shields be used in offices?

No, only used in public-facing spaces like FCU or MIT Medical; marginal benefit otherwise.

## How do we take care of the vulnerable people in our lives?

MIT has done a lot to ensure the MIT community has a safe place to learn, work, and conduct research. There’s been a low overall infection rate. You can feel confident that campus is a safe working environment thanks to testing, vaccination requirement, and indoor masking.

### Advice for families with children under 12:

* Adults and children in family continue to wear masks whether they’re vaccinated or not
* Focus family activities on outdoor gatherings
* Avoid indoor gatherings, restaurants, shopping, larger gatherings

### I have a child at home who cannot be vaccinated yet. I share an office space with someone who’s not vaccinated. What’s the best way to keep everyone safe?

Everyone wears a mask.

## Should we do anything if we receive an exposure notification through our cell phone?

* Think about where it could have come from and get a test, especially if you were in a higher risk setting
* Monitor for symptoms

## Are masks and hand hygiene still the best and only methods for protecting oneself?

* You should also be mindful of your surrounding and activities
* Hand hygiene is always important

## If one is planning to travel internationally, are there any precautions one should take?

* Not at this time – CDC recommends self-quarantine, MIT doesn’t have requirement but requests you get tested before returning if possible
* Don’t come to work if you’re feeling ill, even if it could be from travel/plane
* Be diligent about masking during travel

# Testing

## Can you explain self-test kits?

* Piloting with small groups on campus over the next couple weeks
* Swab kit
* Scan QR code that accompanies tube to register that you’ve tested
* A dozen drop boxes around campus will be picked up one or two times per day

## What happens when somebody tests positive?

* First, MIT Medical gets a notification of the positive test and the individual is notified on the app
* MIT Medical talks to person who’s positive and does a contact tracing interview
  + Please let MIT Medical run the process instead of notifying everyone yourself
  + They will reach out if you’re a close contact (CDC definition)
    - If you’re vaccinated, you don’t have to quarantine but you need to get tested between days 3 and 5 and self-observe for symptoms
    - Other people have minimal to no risk
    - If for some reason, an individual thinks they might have been a close contact with a positive covid case but haven’t been contacted please indicate in the app and MIT Medical will reach out
* After this process, supervisor and department heads are notified
  + In general, MIT Medical won’t notify whole area/department
* If a person is positive or a close contact, their card is temporarily disabled

## Is testing the same for delta?

The lab can do QPCR for variants of concern.

## How long should I allow for testing lines?

* We don’t expect long lines with self-testing
* There will be two staffed stations
* Get into the habit of looking at your result before going to work

## For those with long commutes, will there be satellite locations for test swabs?

* Multiple locations well-distributed across campus
* If you need a time-sensitive second test, you can get one at the appropriate time at another location closer to home

## Can you clarify the timing of testing and reporting to work? If someone’s on campus one day a week or less, is it okay to test that morning and come in?

* Yes, same-day testing is fine—the QR code in the app registers your test and sets off the chain of events to get into campus

## If we’re fully vaccinated and have provided status, why is testing required?

* R0 has gone up from 2.5 to 5 - 9
  + In a gathering of 10 people in close contact with one person with covid, 5-9 people can be infected
  + Weekly testing enables control of the virus
    - Testing can be dialed up or down as needed

# Vaccines

## Can you provide more information on boosters?

* There are ongoing vaccine booster trials
* Several countries have recommended boosters; however, WHO has recommended against boosters while much of the world remains unvaccinated, until we get to 10%
* Vaccines remain effective in preventing hospitalization and death; less so in preventing transmission

## Will MIT share vaccination percentages on a finer scale, perhaps by DLC?

* Campus vaccination rates
  + Expecting around 98.5 to 99% vaccinated with 1 to 1.5% exempt
  + Assume you’re close to this percent for your community as well
* Can larger DLCs request stats?
  + Not at the moment, but CS can request follow-up

## How are incoming post-docs from countries without access to vaccines going to be handled?

* Those who are mid-series or can’t access a vaccine will be given a temporary exemption
* Fully unvaccinated folks will get a vaccine within two days of arrival
  + They don’t have to wait the full two weeks after the second dose because there are other measures in place (testing, masking)

### What about students who received vaccines not approved by the FDA?

* + First priority is fully unvaccinated people
  + Next will be people who received vaccines that aren’t approved by WHO
  + Lastly people who got WHO-approved but non-FDA-approved vaccine

## Why are vaccinated people contracting covid?

* Efficacy of the vaccine
  + Lower than initial data, closer to 70-80% rate
  + Prevent severe endpoint but not necessarily infection in the first place

## Can vaccinated breakthrough cases infect other vaccinated individuals?

* Yes, confirmed from the data that came out of the Cape showing transmission from vaccinated to vaccinated individuals

# Return to Campus Logistics

## Has there been any thought to keeping some people remote as opposed to raising campus population?

* Mission requires a full presence at MIT
* Not planning to close down again
* Highly confident in safety of MIT

## Will incoming students be able to access buildings before they start their term?

* Yes, once they start the moving in process, students can access any buildings they’re allowed to access

## I have a team member who received an exemption. What rules and guidance should I keep in mind to keep everyone safe?

* Regardless of vaccination status, observe testing requirements
* Make sure people aren’t coming to work when they’re sick with covid-19 symptoms
* As a manager or leader, walk around and say “please put your mask on”

## Any advice to help prepare for the return to campus in September?

* [Tips for coming back to campus](https://covidapps.mit.edu/quick-guide-returning-campus)
* Download Covid Pass app on phone or access it through desktop
* You need your ID badge to access various buildings
  + Make sure it has “Charlie Inside” logo or get an updated ID from the Atlas Service Center
* Try getting tested at the same time every week

## Events

## What advice is there for orientation events at the start of the term, especially for unvaccinated people?

* It’s almost impossible to facilitate quarantine for residential population, so there’s an entry testing protocol for all students instead:
  + Day 0, day 4, and day 7
  + Test turnaround is within 10-16 hours
  + Unvaccinated individuals have been asked to limit indoor activities until first result is back
* Majority are vaccinated
* Orientation leaders have been asked to plan outdoor activities

### Many policy changes have been announced as effective immediately which complicates event planning. Are there plans to change indoor masking for events with food?

* Current information is what MIT Medical has in mind for return to campus
* There will be an event planner town hall/info sessions to cover very specific questions for event planners (email Connie for details)
* There are safe ways to include food in gatherings
* A lot of people are still uncomfortable with crowded, indoor meals

### What is MIT Medical’s stance on off-campus events?

* This year, you can have an off-campus gathering within venue restrictions
* Understand there’s risk in those scenarios