



NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Frequently Asked Questions

Reopening Postsecondary Institutions

New Mexico’s public colleges and universities are planning to provide a mix of remote and essential hybrid or in-person classes, service operations, and research efforts this Fall Semester. Be assured, we are all committed to a measured approach of reopening campus facilities and, additionally, protocols will be deployed to reduce COVID-19 spread and transmissions. On-going decisions will depend on epidemiological data, public health models, COVID safe practices, mass gathering limits and other directives from [Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham](#) and the [New Mexico Department of Health](#).

Higher Education Employees

Is there a standard definition for the term *essential worker*?

Colleges and universities may present differences in their definition for the term “essential worker” but the New Mexico Department of Health has identified the following occupational groups as being essential.

- Healthcare
- Public health
- Indigent care
- Childcare
- Infrastructure operations
- Manufacturing
- Defense research
- Service sector
- Professional services
- Financial services
- Emergency services
- Food and agriculture
- Energy and water
- Transportation
- Communication and information technology
- Certain administrative operations

Click [here](#) to view a full list of essential businesses and operations.

What is the operating occupancy for colleges and universities during this time?

Colleges and universities are encouraged to implement telework assignments where possible and limit in-person work to essential employees and functions. General administrative and business operations should be limited to 25% of the maximum occupancy of any enclosed space on the campus, as determined by the relevant fire marshal or fire department.

Each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring faculty and staff follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

What is the definition of a high-risk individual?

Some people may be more likely to have severe illness than others because they have characteristics or medical conditions that increase their COVID-19 risk such as older age or having certain underlying conditions. A high-risk individual is a person who has an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Some underlying conditions that can contribute to this include, but are not limited to, diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, autoimmune disorders, heart conditions and more.

We recognize that there will be students, faculty and staff members who will be considered to be a high-risk group as defined by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). We encourage all colleges and universities to establish policies to support these individuals during the span of the COVID-19 pandemic. The New Mexico Department of Health follows CDC's established guidance for [high-risk individuals](#) and [individuals living with high-risk groups](#).

Who should I contact if I believe my college is overlooking a provision within the public health order or executive orders?

If you believe your college or university is overlooking the State of New Mexico's orders, please contact your institution to discuss your concerns. A contact for each public higher education institution is available at [RestartNewMexico.us](#). If reporting structures are not established or if you have outstanding concerns, please report non-compliance to the State of New Mexico by clicking [here](#). Your personal information will not be collected to report non-compliance.

I live outside of New Mexico and commute to campus for work. What are the quarantine requirements?

Per the current [public health order and executive orders](#), any person traveling into New Mexico, including students, faculty and staff returning to colleges and universities, must self-quarantine for 14 consecutive days. This requirement is in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. If a student presents any symptoms of the virus or has been in contact with an individual who has tested positive, he or she should get tested.

There are limited exceptions for neighboring commuters. If you are an essential employee living in a bordering state full-time and you are unable to perform your work duties remotely, you will not need to self-quarantine in order to complete your essential work at a New Mexico college or university.

Students

If I have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, what should I do?

You should get tested as quickly as possible. You can contact your healthcare provider or the student health and wellness center on your campus. Additionally, COVID-19 testing is now available at the New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory Division, TriCore Reference Laboratories, LabCorp, Mayo Clinic Laboratories, Quest Diagnostics, and BioReference Laboratories. Please call 1-855-600-3453 and press option two (2) to speak with a nurse.

As with any respiratory illness, you should eliminate contact with other people while you are sick, wear a face covering, cough or sneeze into a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands), and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Can my college or university require that I attend a class in person?

Colleges and universities are being asked to limit in-person instruction to courses where it is essential that face-to-face instruction occur. Examples of these types of courses include clinicals, practica, interactive labs, vocational education and field-based experiences.

Each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring these experiences follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

There may be a point in time in which a student will have to miss a class due to COVID-19 isolation or quarantine requirements. We encourage you to work with your instructor and college to complete the course requirements.

Will I be required to complete my clinical, practicum or field-based experience in person?

It is important to note that oftentimes these experiences are required by regulation and licensing entities. Your college or university may have a plan that provides alternatives to required clinical, practicum or field-based experiences. Please check with your program advisor.

It may be necessary that you complete these requirements in-person or in a hybrid format. Nonetheless, each higher education institution is responsible for ensuring the site for these experiences follows all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

The public health order also includes some exemptions to out-of-state travel for health-related clinical requirements.

Can an online course include components that require in-person attendance or testing?

Yes, this model is often referred to as a hybrid course. Your college or university may require you to attend a course in person, however, each higher education institution must follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID safe practices](#), which include mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

Will I need to take exams in person?

It depends on the course. Some course requirements are connected to licensing requirements that call for specific measures while taking exams. Your college or university may require you to test in person, however, your higher education institution must follow all [public health orders, executive orders](#) and [COVID safe practices](#), which includes mandatory face coverings, proper social distancing, and frequent sanitizing of hands and shared spaces.

Is my institution required to provide me with the hardware and software necessary to complete my courses online?

No, but colleges and universities may continue to provide these services through campus computer labs, libraries or student services centers while practicing 25% maximum occupancy and [COVID safe practices](#). See your college's reopening plan at [RestartNewMexico.us](https://www.restartnewmexico.us) for specific information on student services during this time.

Who do I speak with if I have concerns with the quality of my online or hybrid course?

You are encouraged to start by contacting the course instructor as they may be able to quickly resolve your concerns. Other appropriate institutional contacts include department leadership and the dean of instruction.

Additionally, institutions will typically provide students with a post-course survey that captures input on course quality. If issues are not resolved through the above recommendations, you may submit an inquiry to the New Mexico Higher Education Department by clicking [here](#).

What can I do if a course required for graduation is not being offered?

You are encouraged to contact your advisor or department leadership to explore options for completing graduation requirements in the timeliest manner possible. It is important to also explore whether your college or university would accept alternative coursework that may fulfill your graduation requirements or if taking a similar course at another higher education institution would be acceptable. If you do take a course at another higher education institution, please be sure to check with the financial aid office at your primary institution about whether a consortium agreement is needed for your account.

If a course is required for graduation, is my institution required to offer it online?

No, however, you should contact your advisor or department head to identify any alternative coursework that may fulfill your graduation requirements.

Can my college or university still provide food services?

Yes, however, the public health order prohibits indoor dining and self-serve food service at this time. Nonetheless, your college or university has likely developed a plan for pickup and/or delivery services. For dining services, all higher education institutions are subjected to the public health order surrounding restaurants and food service. See your college's reopening plan at [RestartNewMexico.us](https://www.restartnewmexico.us) for specific information on student services during this time.

If I am traveling to New Mexico from out-of-state to begin the Fall Semester, do I need to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival?

Yes. Per the current [public health order and executive orders](#), any person traveling into New Mexico, including students returning to colleges and universities, must self-quarantine for 14 consecutive days. This requirement is in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. If a student presents any symptoms of COVID-19 or has been in contact with an individual who has tested positive for the virus, he or she should get tested.

I live outside of New Mexico and commute to campus for classes. What are the quarantine requirements?

There are limited exceptions for neighboring commuters. If you are enrolled in a class that does not offer a remote instructional model and you live in a bordering state full time, you will not need to self-quarantine in order to complete your coursework at a New Mexico college or university. However, you are strongly encouraged to limit your activities in New Mexico to only those necessary for traveling and attending your courses.

My clinical, practicum or field-based experience is located outside of New Mexico. Is there any exception to the self-quarantine requirement?

If you are a student who has a clinical in the healthcare field that is in a bordering state to New Mexico, you may attend your clinical and return to New Mexico without self-quarantining upon return. All colleges and universities are encouraged to implement a policy that requires students to attest they will only attend their clinical and return to New Mexico without stopping at a place or business in the other state.

Who do I contact if I have questions about my financial aid eligibility which was impacted by COVID-19?

First, contact your institution's financial aid office. If there are questions after contacting the institution's financial aid office, students and parents may also contact our agency's [Financial Aid Division](#) via email at fin.aid@state.nm.us or call us at 1-800-279-9777.

General Constituent Inquiries

Where can I express my concerns and preferences with reopening plans for my college or university?

Each college and university has identified a campus contact who can answer questions related to the institution's reopening plan. This point of contact can be found at RestartNewMexico.us. If you still have unanswered questions or concerns, you can contact our agency by clicking [here](#).

If I receive medical care outside the state, will I be required to self-quarantine for 14 days each time I return to New Mexico?

No, the mandatory self-quarantine does not apply to an individual if he or she leaves the state to obtain medical care. However, you shall limit your activities to only those necessary for receiving medical care.

Other Higher Education Questions

The New Mexico Higher Education Department encourages students and parents to work with college and university staff as a primary contact for questions and concerns related to reopening campuses. Below is guidance on how concerns may be routed.

- General inquiries regarding the reopening of your campus should be directed to the college's point of contact, which can be found at RestartNewMexico.us.
- For questions related to on-campus housing and dining, please contact your college or university's residence life office.
- For questions related to required coursework, please contact a program advisor, department leadership or dean of instruction.
- For questions related to billing, fees and payment options, please contact your institution's business office.

If issues are not resolved through the above recommendations, you may submit an inquiry to the New Mexico Higher Education Department by emailing HigherEd.Info@state.nm.us.

Other Information

Signs and Symptoms

Living in a COVID-positive world requires discipline from all of us. In order for the rate of spread of COVID-19 to decrease enough for higher education institutions and businesses to safely reopen, it is imperative that New Mexicans stay home as much as possible. Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Loss of taste or smell

If you present any of these symptoms or if you have been in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, you should get tested as soon as possible.

COVID-19 Statewide Response Referral Numbers

- Coronavirus Information Hotline: 1-833-551-0518
- Coronavirus Health Hotline: 1-855-600-3453
- Crisis and Access Hotline: 1-855-662-7474

Other Education and Child Care Questions

- K-12 Public Education: 1-833-415-0567
- Early Childhood Education and Care: 1-800-691-9067