

COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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

[Proclamation 20-12.2](#) sets minimum protocols higher education institutions must follow to bring students safely back to campus.

[The Healthy Washington plan](#) is a region-by-region 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. Generally speaking:

- Instructional activities (classrooms/labs) 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](#).

Some activities are addressed in both plans.

Activity	Proclamation 20-12.2	Healthy Washington and business guidance
Instructional activities (classrooms/labs)	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	Indoor gatherings are banned under phase 1 of the Healthy Washington plan

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What's the difference between the former Safe Start Washington plan and the new Healthy Washington plan?

The [Healthy Washington Plan](#) replaced the Safe Start Washington Plan on Jan. 11. The key differences are:

- Phases are no longer determined on a county-by-county level. Instead, they are based on eight regions. Those regions are drawn largely around the emergency medical services regions used for evaluating healthcare services:
 - **Puget Sound:** King, Pierce, Snohomish
 - **East: Adams,** Asotin, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Whitman
 - **North:** Island, San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom
 - **North Central:** Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Okanogan
 - **Northwest:** Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason
 - **South Central:** Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Kittitas, Walla Walla, Yakima
 - **Southwest:** Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum
 - **West:** Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, Thurston
- There are only two phases instead of four. At the time this publication was written (Jan. 14), all eight regions were in phase 1 under the new plan. For the most part, phase 1 restrictions align with the restrictions under the previous plan (the Nov. 15, 2020 restrictions). However, some restrictions were eased in areas like indoor fitness centers and outdoor social gatherings.
- Regions can advance to phase 2, or slide back to phase 1, based on certain metrics around case rates, hospital admission rates, positivity rates and ICU capacity.
- There's no application process to move through the phases. The state will look at the metrics every Friday and determine whether regions will move backward or forward the following Monday. Regions will be able check their status on the state's [COVID-19 risk assessment dashboard](#).

This fact sheet focuses on phase 1 guidance since our entire state is now in phase 1. We will update this document once regions start moving to phase 2.

If the entire state is in phase 1, does that mean we should follow the original phase 1 guidance of spring 2019?

No, the [Healthy Washington](#) plan creates a “new” phase 1 that basically continues the restrictions that were already in place over the holidays, before the Healthy Washington plan took effect on Jan. 11. According to [an announcement from the Governor's Office](#):

“Phase 1, for the most part, aligns with restrictions currently in place for most counties today, with a few key exceptions. Indoor fitness and outdoor entertainment, for example, were both previously prohibited, but will now be permitted with restrictions.”

Thus, whatever restrictions were in place before Jan. 11 remain in place, unless they were specifically updated in the new plan.

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 [Proclamation 20-12.2](#) 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 alternative arrangements for personnel (including student workers) upon request, including employees who refuse to come 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.
 - Indoor social gatherings are prohibited under phase 1 of the [Healthy Washington plan](#).
- [The proclamation](#) includes additional requirements for Greek housing and university-style dorms.
- **For campus food services:**
 - Campus food services follow the [higher education proclamation](#) which — unlike the [Healthy Washington plan](#) — allows indoor dining. The proclamation requires colleges to separate people by six feet (basically, one person per table), unless the diners are family members or already live together. Colleges must also limit capacity at 50 percent. It is virtually impossible for colleges to monitor whether diners live together, so SBCTC highly recommends colleges make it standard practice to allow only one diner per table.
 - Also follow other health and safety the guidelines in the [higher education proclamation](#): place floor markings to promote physical distancing, post signs reminding visitors of safety protocols (such as maintaining a 6-foot distance, using a mask, and using hand sanitizer), and require customers to wear cloth face coverings when they're not eating. Routinely sanitize high-touch surfaces and common areas (door handles, points of sale). Restrict cash payments; allow payments only by card or in other ways that don't require physical contact.
 - Additionally, follow the [health and safety guidelines for public restaurants](#) (which generally track closely with the proclamation anyway).

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.

Are colleges required to limit gathering sizes?

Yes, all types of gatherings — except direct instruction — are subject to gathering-size limits under the [Healthy Washington plan](#). Under phase 1 of the plan:

- Indoor gatherings are prohibited.
- Outdoor gatherings are limited to 10 people from outside a household, with a limit of two households.

What about travel?

On Jan. 12, the CDC 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. The order will take effect on Jan. 26. Until then, Gov. Inslee's advisory and restrictions still stand:

- Gov. Inslee on Nov. 13 issued a [public travel advisory](#) recommending a 14-day quarantine for interstate and international travel.
- On Dec. 21, the governor [made the quarantine a requirement](#) for anyone entering Washington state after visiting the United Kingdom, South Africa, or other countries experiencing a new COVID strain, which was first detected in the United Kingdom.

Can libraries remain open?

In the absence of new guidance, college libraries should continue to follow the [county-based, phased guidance for public libraries dated Oct. 6](#). The safety protocols encourage libraries to continue to provide curbside service and limit in-person interactions as much as possible. Library capacity is limited to 50 percent in what were formally considered “phase 3” counties and 25 percent in what were formally considered “phase 2” counties. Libraries in the former “[modified phase 1 counties](#)” must remain closed but they are allowed to offer [curbside pickup services](#) under former phase 2 guidance.

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 regional 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?

SBCTC encourages colleges to refrain from holding in-person choir, band or orchestra practices, rehearsals or performances, following the latest [restrictions on those activities at religious services \(Nov. 15\)](#).

May we rent out our conference center?

In the absence of new guidance, college conference centers should continue to follow [the latest guidance dated Nov. 15](#). Under the Nov. 15 guidance, convention centers and venues can only be used for professional training and testing that cannot be performed remotely. Room occupancy is limited to 25% of indoor occupancy limits or 100 people, whichever is fewer. Since indoor gatherings contribute to the spread of COVID-19, SBCTC strongly recommends colleges stop renting out their venues altogether.

What are the rules for campus food services?

Please see page 4 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](#). In phase 1, the plan prohibits indoor dining, but allows outdoor dining with a maximum of six people per table from no more than two households.

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.
- No spectators are allowed at any NWAC member college athletic event. ([Healthy Washington](#) plan and [NWAC Health and Safety Policies](#))

Are There Limits for Campus Fitness Centers?

In phase 1, Gov. Inslee's [Healthy Washington](#) plan allows 45-minute, appointment-based training in fitness centers. The maximum is one customer/athlete per room or, for larger facilities, one customer/athlete per 500 sq. ft.

Low-risk sports groups — such as dance, no contact martial arts, gymnastics and climbing — may practice and train only in stable groups of five people or less.

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](#).

What are the Rules for Resuming Intercollegiate Athletics?

For the most update to date information regarding the resumption of athletics, please talk to your athletic director about the [NWAC's \(Northwest Athletic Conference\) Return-to-Play Guidelines](#).

When are students, faculty and staff eligible for vaccines?

The Department of Health has created two new tools to help the general public find out which vaccination phase they're in:

- [Washington's COVID-19 vaccine phases illustration](#)
- [Phase Finder](#)

Many colleges have asked whether our health care faculty and students qualify under the A1 and A2 vaccination schedule, and whether our entire faculty will qualify under phase B2 like K-12 teachers/staff do.

The Department of Health has advised SBCTC that our faculty and staff are prioritized with people in the community doing similar high-risk, in-person activities where it is difficult to maintain six feet of physical distancing. Examples include nursing faculty and students engaged with direct patient care, or campus child care workers engaged with providing child care.

In general, though, higher education faculty and staff will not be treated the same way as K-12 schools because people in schools are more likely to have closer, physical contact with students.

The Department of Health has also advised SBCTC that the goal is to vaccinate 70% of adults by June.

On Jan. 12, the [CDC issued new guidance](#) urging states to immediately start vaccinating people age 65 and older and people with health problems. However, the CDC guidance is not mandatory for states. At the time this publication was written (Jan. 14), Washington state had not changed its phased vaccination distribution plan.

Are colleges still required to have a COVID-19 safety supervisor with designees in each learning space?

Unlike the original phase 1 and phase 2 safety protocols, the [higher education proclamation](#) does not require COVID-19 safety supervisors in each learning space. The guidance document does, however, recommend identifying people in charge of COVID-19 safety. Colleges that operate student housing must have a COVID-19 safety monitor on site at all times.

Are temperature checks still required before people come to campus?

The [higher education proclamation](#) does not require temperature checks 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. Many 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/3i4Koc2): <https://bit.ly/3i4Koc2>

[Higher education proclamation 20-12.2](https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2): <https://bit.ly/2HaJ7T2>

[Reopening guidance for businesses under Gov. Inslee's Safe Start Plan](https://bit.ly/33dP2Pp): <https://bit.ly/33dP2Pp>

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

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

[COVID-19 – risk assessment dashboard \(shows phases and metrics by region\)](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>

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>

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