COVID-19: ADAPTING OUR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOURS ON OUR CAMPUS
CONTENTS

SECTION 1: PROTECTING AGAINST COVID-19 TRANSMISSION 4

SECTION 2: ADAPTING OUR BEHAVIOURS ON CAMPUS TO PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19 5-6

SECTION 3: WASHING OR SANITISING YOUR HANDS REGULARLY 7

SECTION 4: PRACTISING SOCIAL DISTANCING/PHYSICAL DISTANCING 8-11

SECTION 5: WEARING FACE COVERING OR MASKS 12

SECTION 6: MAINTAIN OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS 13
The main ways of COVID-19 transmission are thought to occur:

- Through contact with respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and droplets from their mouth or nose are propelled into the air. The droplets are not airborne for long, but they do travel and the droplets can be inhaled into the lungs of an uninfected person.

- Through contact with a surface contaminated with the virus droplets; when a person subsequently touches their own eyes, nose or mouth they may come into contact with the virus. It is currently believed that COVID-19 droplets can survive for up to 72 hours on plastic, 48 hours on stainless steel and 8 hours on copper.

Recent studies show that people who do not have symptoms but are infected can also play a role in the spread of the infection. A list of references used in compiling this and other guidance is available on the COVID-19 webpages.

The main ways of reducing transmission are: washing or sanitising hands regularly; practising social distancing; and wearing face covering or masks. The precise behavioural implications of each of these are discussed later in this document.
SECTION 2: ADAPTING OUR BEHAVIOURS ON CAMPUS TO PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19

When planning a return to campus it is useful to think of the correct behaviours we have been advised to take as preventative barriers to transmission. Failure to follow these behaviours could transmit the virus to others or to oneself.

The behaviours we have been encouraged to adopt are regular hand washing, cleaning of any shared equipment before and/or after use and maintaining social distancing when out of your home. We will have become used to most of these behaviours; however, there is a risk that returning to the campus could trigger a return to habitual behaviours that are now less safe.

Factors which may lead to COVID-19 hygiene or social distancing rules being ignored or broken include:

- Uncertainty over how to do things correctly, potentially due to a lack of rules or guidance.
- Experience to date leading to an underestimation of the risk (if someone has not contracted the virus, does not know anyone who has, or has had a mild case of it).
- Pressures that counteract safe behaviours, e.g. time pressures and feeling there is no time to do things ‘the right way’.
- Lack of physical infrastructure to support or allow correct behaviours.
- Peer pressure; social groups encouraging non-compliance.
In order to help our community to adopt, on site, these new behaviours that we have become accustomed to outside of the campus, the University will:

- Communicate clear behavioural rules and protocols for carrying out certain tasks when working, living and studying within the University of Essex campuses. Communication can be enhanced by using visual aids, floor makings, and pictorial signs that can easily be recognised by all.
- Allow staff and students any extra time needed to comply with expected rules.
- Ensure that work and study practices do not conflict with any expected risk control behaviours.
- Monitor behaviours, and challenge rule breaking early on with a clear and transparent policy and process for doing this. Guidance on how this will be addressed can be found in the FAQs on the COVID-19 webpages.
- Repeat messages to avoid slipping back into old routines.
- Update messages and expectations, keeping them current and in line with the latest Government and scientific advice.
- Implement and maintain a rapid response to the changing external environment by the Workplace Health Safety Wellbeing (WHSW) team to keep abreast of new developments and unanticipated situations, in order to develop suitable protocols.
- Provide a range of wellbeing provision to support the University community in managing anxieties and building personal resilience to the challenges faced from a return to campus.

We will ensure that all behavioural instructions are regularly reviewed by WHSW and the COVID-19 Working Group, to ensure that they are effective and that they realistically reflect the work environment and the work staff are carrying out.

The next sections explain the behaviours expected when we return to campus.
SECTION 3: WASHING OR SANITISING YOUR HANDS REGULARLY

Handwashing is still vital in the fight against coronavirus and a behaviour that we need to adopt regularly when back on campus.

Sanitising or washing hands regularly with warm soapy water and drying them thoroughly will help to wash off any virus that may be on the skin.

The NHS messages about handwashing are clear: regularly washing hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds is central to preventing COVID-19 transmission. Regular handwashing reduces the risk of contracting viruses when the nose, eyes, mouth or face are touched.

We all need to ensure that we wash our hands frequently:

- Wash your hands when leaving the house or arriving home; after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing; and before eating or handling food.
- Wash your hands regularly particularly after touching surfaces, such as doorknobs, drawer handles and phones.
- Wash your hands before cooking or eating.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet facilities.
- Avoid touching your face as much as possible.
- Clean and wipe down these and other shared areas as much as possible; anti-bacterial wipes will be provided in central areas for use when needing to wipe down keyboards or workstations.
- When receiving an item from someone else, wipe it down and wash your hands.

These last three actions are not enough on their own, however; handwashing is still a crucial defence. Recent studies suggest the COVID-19 virus can be viable for up to 24 hours on cardboard, as well as three days on hard surfaces such as hard plastic. Wiping down surfaces with detergent, sanitisers, warm washing up liquid and then washing your hands will help to reduce the risk of transmission to yourself.

Washing and sanitising hands regularly may result in stripping the skin and cause it to be dry and cracked. This can be prevented by regularly using moisturisers (Saunders-Hastings, Crispo, Sikora & Krewski, 2017).

Hygiene behaviour change is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. Every time we wash hands, we will help break the chain of infection. We will be making sure that all hand washing facilities are cleaned and checked regularly to ensure that everything is in good working order; please report any concerns to the Estates helpdesk.
SECTION 4: PRACTISING SOCIAL DISTANCING/PHYSICAL DISTANCING

What is Social Distancing?

Social distancing (also known as physical distancing) means that we need to keep our distance from others when outside our own home. Making sure we all adhere to this can help stop the spread of infections such as COVID-19.

In the past we have not needed to put in place such extreme measures. COVID-19 is an infection where there is currently no general population immunity and no vaccination, so social distancing is a vital protective measure.

Some of the main messages from the Government on social distancing are:
- Work/study from home if you are able
- Keep your distance from people outside your household
- Avoid crowds
- Reduce the number of people with whom you spend time within a work or study setting
- Avoid face-to-face interactions with people if they are outside your household or social bubble

When travelling to the University avoid, where possible, public transport. If you have to use public transport, wear a face covering and avoid rush hours. People and Culture provide guidance on how staggering start times can allow staff to avoid rush hour on the COVID-19 webpages.

Reducing physical distance (social distancing) between healthy individuals outside of the home (for example, on University campuses) can help to delay the transmission of COVID-19 and reduce the size of an outbreak.

It will also help to protect those in our University community whose work roles mean that they find it more difficult to keep to social distancing and those who may be more susceptible to severe symptoms if infected with COVID-19.

As a result of COVID-19, normal everyday behaviour such as shaking hands, handing someone a coffee, sharing food or giving a hug can now be gestures which can carry an increased risk of infection.

The University is a very social place and under normal circumstances the Colchester campus can have as many as 12,000 people on site at one time, with 5000 students living there. In order to assist with social distancing, under Enhanced Protection, only staff who are not able to carry out their work from home should come onto campus. Under Sustained Protection, staff who can work from home are encouraged to continue to do so. Full details are available in the University’s Business Continuity Plan.
Ongoing COVID-19 workplace risk assessments will identify how our premises can be adapted to support social distancing with measures such as new signage, markings, reducing the size of classes and adapting offices.

There are, in addition, a number of measures that individuals themselves need to take in order to achieve the shared responsibility of keeping ourselves and others safe on campus.

In order to reduce the risk of another person getting infected with COVID-19 the University will ensure that it enables social distancing as far as practically possible and in line with Government guidance.

Everyone has a role to play in slowing the spread of COVID-19, and in protecting themselves, their family, and the community at the University of Essex. It is important for us to remember that this is a very difficult time for everyone. Some people may feel more vulnerable due to their health risks, personal experiences or their anxiety about catching or transmitting the infection to other vulnerable people.

Often, we move around the University campus paying little attention to our surroundings and signage as this is all so familiar already. When coming back on to the University campus you should treat it like it is a new road layout – observing the signs, looking out for hazards and moving cautiously so you can follow any new guidance.

There is one exception to this. If a fire alarm sounds, exit any building via the nearest escape route regardless of new layout and signage. On evacuation, try to social distance as best you can, and spread out when at the fire assembly point.

Respect and courtesy for each other should be central to the University community when working within the new measures and expected behaviours on the University campuses. This can be achieved by following the guidance relevant to each individual area and complying politely with any reminders of potential breaches of social distancing. We should also remember to be kind when reminding others of the new ways of behaving on campus; we are all human, and others may not realise they are not following social distancing guidance.
The specifics of practising social distancing on campus:

1. **When walking around the campus** – you may need to plan more time to get where you want to be so you can stop and allow people to pass safely, wait in line in queues and follow the signage for moving around the buildings safely. In some areas around the University there may be one-way routes for you to follow.

2. **In food outlets, cafes, restaurants and bars** – you will need to observe social distancing requirements, separating you from the person in front, wear your face covering, and follow the painted floor markings. In addition:
   a. Patience will be required when placing or receiving orders and when waiting. You will also need to maintain a social distance.
   b. Once cafes, restaurants and bars reopen for you to eat or drink on the premises, you will only be able to eat on a table without social distancing if you live in the same household. If not, you will need to maintain a social distance at a table from others and preferably eat outside.
   c. Some of our food outlets will be running a takeaway service only.

3. **Shops/Banks** – Be aware of maintaining your distance within a shop or other enclosed environment; the shops will help you to be able to do this by limiting the amount of people inside the shops at any one time.

4. **Kitchens** – Those located next to offices can only be accessed by one person at a time to ensure that social distancing can be maintained.

5. **Toilets** – Wear face coverings when entering a toilet area as social distancing is more difficult to maintain. In toilet facilities with multiple cubicles, where all the cubicles are occupied wait outside until someone exits, then go in. In addition:
   a. Depending on the size of the toilet facility and the number of cubicles, wait for one person to leave before you come out of the cubicle to wash your hands.
   b. The University may keep some cubicles locked to allow social distance between the cubicles. Some urinals will be put out of action to allow for social distancing.
   c. Please close the lid of the toilet before flushing the toilet, as this will stop the aerosol spray of any infection. Please make sure you wash and dry your hands thoroughly before you leave and sanitise your hands outside when you exit the toilet area.
6. **Offices** – In open plan environments, only one workstation and equipment should be used per person (no hotdesking). In addition:

   a. Managers will need to limit the numbers of staff to levels that are consistent with social distancing. The thirds/halves of teams noted under Enhanced and Sustained Protection respectively are maximums only, and the number of staff in an office at any one time must not exceed the number that would allow for safe social distancing. Consider distancing of furniture and seating plans so you are not sitting face to face with colleagues.

   b. When working with someone else in the office, moving to a colleague’s screen to see something will breach social distancing requirements. Instead, consider sending the information by email or sharing online.

   c. Wipe down your equipment and wash/sanitise your hands following use.

   d. Please do not use fans in offices as they may facilitate the spread of droplets.

7. **Use technology for meetings** – Wherever possible, meetings should continue to be held by Zoom. This is especially important if the space allocated for a meeting is not large enough to support social distancing. This will also enable those working at home to be included equitably. If all the team members are on site, consider holding meetings outside if weather conditions permit this.

8. **In computer labs** – Use alternate computers and wipe the keyboard, mouse and table before your use and after use; follow any signage for instruction of use.

9. **Lectures** –

   a. Designated seating layouts will be clearly displayed in every lecture room to ensure that social distancing can be maintained. Furniture should not be rearranged.

   b. Be mindful of the need to maintain the required level of social distancing if waiting outside a lecture theatre, for example, and allow enough space for other people to pass by if they need to.

10. **Sharing of food and drinks** – Avoid collecting food or drink for others (such as a coffee round) as this will mean touching food and drink containers yourself and then passing them on.

11. **Gatherings on campus** - These should be limited to small groups following current Government guidance; at present, this means no more than six people in any group, with social distancing maintained.

12. **PPE** - (Staff Only) Use appropriate PPE where your workplace risk assessment advises this and where social distancing cannot be maintained.
SECTION 5: WEARING FACE COVERING OR MASKS

In certain situations, social distancing can be difficult and so we have carefully considered the benefit of wearing face masks/face coverings.

Laboratory research shows that homemade masks are less effective than medical-grade masks in reducing potential disease spread from the mask wearer to other people, but more effective than no mask at all. Homemade face masks can provide some protection, even after three hours of wearing.

Systematic reviews on ‘flu transmission’ (believed to be similar to COVID-19 transmission, for example, in that both can be infectious for a day or two before symptoms occur) have found that mask wearing reduced spread of the disease, but demonstrated less clear evidence that it protected the person wearing the mask.

Overall, the scientific evidence indicates that masks could have a role to play in reducing transmission, especially where aerosols are emitted.

Evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) previously confirmed face coverings could help reduce the risk of transmission if you were suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms (UK Government Department of Health and Social Care, 2020).

Face coverings may help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease when we are in an enclosed space where social distancing is not possible and where we meet other people.

The University is asking that face masks/face coverings are worn in all public campus areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain or in specifically designated locations. This will most usually be for short periods indoors; in crowded areas, corridors, shops, outlets; and when travelling on public transport to the University.

Every member of staff and student on our campuses will be issued with two washable face coverings.

Face masks/coverings will only be effective if they are worn properly, covering the nose and mouth and fitted snugly, and kept clean.

How to wear and a face mask/covering and how to make one.

Make sure that you use disposable masks once only and dispose of your mask securely in a bin, and wash your hands after disposing of it.

Face coverings can be washed by placing them in your washing machine or by hand washing. Make sure you change your face covering daily and wash your hands when putting it on or taking it off your face.

It is important to remember that personal, non-medical face coverings:

- Do not replace social distancing - which should still be observed
- Should not be confused with medical-grade masks or respirators, which should be left for healthcare staff and other workers who need them
- Should not be worn by very young children or people who have problems breathing while wearing a face covering
SECTION 6: MAINTAIN OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

Please be aware that this can be a concerning and anxiety-provoking time for many people. Please be patient with others as they learn to adopt these new behaviours on our campuses and please continue to offer support or highlight any concerns you have for the health and wellbeing of another individual.

**Report** - Report any concerns to your line manager or others in the University if you or others do not feel you can safely adopt these safe behaviours. Sources for reporting concerns include:

**Union Safety Representatives**  
https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/health-and-safety-support/union-safety-representatives

**Workplace Health Safety and Wellbeing:**  
https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/professional-services/health-and-safety-team  
https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/professional-services/occupational-health-team

**Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity (SWIS):**  
https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/professional-services/student-wellbeing-and-inclusivity-team

**SU Advice:**  
https://www.essexstudent.com/advice/

**Support and report:**  
https://reportandsupport.essex.ac.uk/
SOURCES OF INFORMATION:


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