

COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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

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

[Safe Start Washington](#) 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 Safe Start Washington plan?

Yes, colleges have to follow both the higher education proclamation and the Safe Start 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 [Safe Start Washington plan](#) and the [business guidance attached to that plan](#).

Some activities are addressed in both plans.

Activity	Proclamation 20-12.2	Safe Start 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	

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Didn't Gov. Inslee also announce new statewide restrictions through Dec. 14, 2020?

Yes, on Nov. 15, Gov. Inslee announced [new statewide restrictions](#) that are effective through at least Dec. 14. The information in this fact sheet reflects those changes.

What are colleges required to do under the higher education proclamation and the Nov. 15 restrictions?

Below is a summary of key mandates colleges and universities must follow under [Proclamation 20-12.2](#) and the [new restrictions announced by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15](#).

- 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:
 - Prohibit indoor social gatherings unless people first quarantine for 14 days or, as an alternative, quarantine for seven days and have a negative COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the gathering. Outdoor gatherings are limited to five people from outside a household. (This is a new requirement under [restrictions announced by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15.](#))
 - 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.
 - Assign a person to be on-site at all times to monitor compliance with the safety rules.
- [The proclamation](#) includes additional requirements for Greek housing and university-style dorms.
- For campus food services:
 - Follow requirements found in the [Washington State reopening guidelines for restaurants](#) for everything except table sizes. Table sizes are determined by the [higher education proclamation](#), which 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.

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. [New restrictions announced by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15](#) prohibit indoor gatherings unless people:

- Quarantine for 14 days before the gathering, or
- Quarantine for seven days before the gathering and have a negative COVID-19 test within 48 hours of the gathering.

Outdoor gatherings are limited to five people from outside a household.

What about travel?

Faced with a surge in COVID-19 cases in Washington, [Gov. Inslee on Nov. 13 issued a public travel advisory](#) recommending a 14-day quarantine for interstate and international travel.

Can libraries remain open?

College libraries must follow [the same safety protocols as public libraries](#) under the Safe Start Washington plan. 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 phase 3 counties and 25 percent in phase 2 counties. Libraries in [modified phase 1](#) counties must remain closed but they are allowed to offer [curbside pickup services](#) under 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 county 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 [new restrictions on those activities at religious services announced Nov. 15](#).

Are there limits for campus fitness centers?

Yes, campus fitness centers must remain closed for indoor operations under [new restrictions announced by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15](#). Outdoor fitness classes are allowed but limited to five people outside the household.

Community and technical colleges may choose, at their own discretion, to open fitness centers for student-athletes who are members of competitive college sports teams to train, condition and practice — provided the colleges comply with [Northwest Athletic Conference \(NWAC\)](#) protocols and keep the centers closed for all other purposes until the governor lifts his latest restrictions.

This guidance reflects the fact that college athletic programs are governed by NWAC instead of the [higher education proclamation](#) or the [Safe Start Washington](#) plan. (Also see [NWAC's FAQ](#).) Currently, NWAC's plans call for colleges to shut down athletic activities starting Nov. 20, and to resume under [NWAC's color-coded phases](#) when classes start winter quarter.

May we rent out our conference center?

Several colleges operate revenue-generating conference centers. Under [new restrictions announced by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15](#), 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 are contributing to a surge in COVID-19 cases in Washington, SBCTC strongly recommends colleges stop renting out their venues while the governor's Nov. 15 restrictions remain in effect (through at least Dec. 14).

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 the [guidance issued by Gov. Inslee on Nov. 15](#). The Nov. 15 guidance prohibits indoor dining through Dec. 14 but allows outdoor dining and to-go service.

What are the rules for resuming sports?

Please talk to your athletic director about the [NWAC's \(Northwest Athletic Conference\) return-to-play guidelines](#).

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 new restrictions announced Nov. 15](https://bit.ly/3klnLdv): <https://bit.ly/3klnLdv>

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

[Gov. Inslee’s Safe Start Plan \(includes the phased reopening chart\)](https://bit.ly/39IHMN1): <https://bit.ly/39IHMN1>

- [Phased 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 \(shows phases and metrics by county\)](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>

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