

**Heller Re-Orientation Meeting**  
**Thursday, September 2, 2021**

**Q&A**

**I. Masks and Distancing**

- 1. What are some of the most important things we can do to ensure our collective safety?**

Be patient with one another, receptive and open, and understand that we all have different levels of risk preference. We should try to accommodate each other's needs. For example, some of us have young children at home who cannot be vaccinated yet and some of us live with immune-compromised individuals. Some of us will want to take greater precautions than others.

Please also take personal responsibility for knowing Brandeis COVID policies and protocols by reading email updates and visiting the [Brandeis COVID Policies](#) website. In addition, be sure to read Heller School COVID updates sent by the Dean and members of the Dean's leadership team.

- 2. Could signs be posted at all of the entrances reminding people to take the daily health assessment each day before they step on campus and encouraging them to stay home if they have any relevant symptoms?**

Yes, we will create signs to be posted at the entrances, and include additional reminders, such as bringing a mask from home every time people come to campus. For anyone who arrives on campus without a mask, masks have been distributed to institutes, centers and programs, and additional boxes are available in the Dean's Office. See Andy Gomez or Joanne Beswick.

- 3. I am seeing students without masks in the library and in other places even though they're 6 feet apart, shouldn't they be wearing masks indoors?**

Yes, masks are required to be worn in all public spaces indoors. They are required in the library at all times, and in other indoor spaces when it is not possible to maintain 6 feet of distance between people. It is Ok to lower one's mask in such settings to take a sip of a beverage.

- 4. I am also seeing staff in their offices with open doors but without masks on. Shouldn't people wear a mask if their door is open? Can we clarify the mask policy?**

If someone is sitting in their office with their door open and not wearing a mask, it is not against policy because there is ventilation and that person is not near anyone. We do allow up to four

people to be in a meeting together without masks. At Brandeis, we are nearly fully vaccinated and we test rigorously. As of this month (September), we test you every 168 hours, or less if you are not visiting campus weekly. Check for regular updates and changes.

**5. Are office doors expected to be kept shut when occupied?**

When occupied, office doors may be kept open or shut. As stated above, individuals whose office doors are open may work without their mask, because there is adequate ventilation and distance from others.

**6. What types of masks are acceptable?**

Allowable face coverings are defined as those that secure via ear loops or with ties and have a snug fit to the face, over the nose, and under the chin and are multilayered. Disposable and cloth masks that meet these specifications are acceptable.

Face coverings with valves or plastic face shields used alone do not provide protection to the user or to the community, nor do bandanas, scarves, or gaiters; such face coverings are unacceptable and do not meet the requirements of this policy. (See the [Brandeis Mask Policy](#) for more information).

**7. I am concerned about exposure to the Delta variant when close to other people indoors, even when masked. Is it Ok to switch to holding virtual meetings rather than in-person meetings?**

Rather than make an individual decision about how to handle this issue, speak with your supervisor or team members, as this impacts others in your sphere. If your team needs some assistance developing a plan, research institutes and centers may contact Cindy Thomas, academic programs may contact Darren Zinner and Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld, and other departments may contact Ron Etlinger.

## **II. Vaccines, Testing and Contact Tracing**

**1. Are students who received vaccines outside the U.S. that are not approved here required to re-vaccinate with U.S.-approved vaccines?**

Brandeis only accepts vaccines approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the World Health Organization. For more information, see the [COVID-19 vaccinations page](#) on the Brandeis COVID-19 Response website.

**2. Where are the COVID testing sites on campus, and what are the best times for a testing appointment?**

There is a testing site right across the street from Heller in the Mandel Forum and another site in the Shapiro Science Center. Try to avoid coming for a test on Monday mornings because it's most crowded at that time. Afternoons between 1:00 and 3:00 PM are usually the best times to schedule a test.

**3. Now that the testing volume is larger, what is the expected turnaround time to receive test results?**

Turn-around time for receiving your test results is calculated from the time your test was received at the Broad Institute. If you drop off your test before noon, your test will be sent to Broad in the 1:00-3:00 PM drop and you will likely have your results by that evening. If you drop off your test in the afternoon, it will be sent to Broad in the evening drop and you will likely have your results the following day. Please note, however, that turn-around times vary.

**4. If a student, staff or faculty member attended a class or gathering and then tested positive, would everyone in that class/at that event be notified?**

No, they would not necessarily be considered close contacts. The contact tracing team would make a determination about who is considered a close contact and then follow-up through their process. Anyone who is named as having been a close contact is contacted by the case tracing team. (A close contact is defined as anyone with whom the individual has been within six feet for at least 15 minutes (cumulative time)).

**5. Should we be asking students in classrooms to note who is near them in a given class so that they are better able to identify close contacts?**

No. The contact tracing team has a process to identify who would be considered a close contact. Anyone who is named as having been a close contact is contacted by the case tracing team. (A close contact is defined as anyone with whom the individual has been within six feet for at least 15 minutes (cumulative time)).

**6. What is the protocol that is being used for students who are in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID in terms of length of quarantine and testing out of the quarantine?**

Anyone on campus who tests positive for COVID (students, faculty and staff) is immediately contacted by a medical provider and informed of their positive result. Their case is then transferred to the case tracing team. The case tracing team calls the positive individual and asks a set of questions vetted by the Department of Public Health and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Also included are questions specific to the Brandeis community regarding their recent close contacts, buildings they have been to, etc. A close contact is

defined as anyone with whom the individual has been within six feet for at least 15 minutes (cumulative time). Anyone who is named as having been a close contact is contacted by the case tracing team.

A risk assessment is conducted with questions about vaccination status, which vaccine was received, underlying health conditions, and the vaccination and immunocompromised status of members of their household.

If the close contact was determined to be a low risk exposure (i.e., everyone was masked and properly distanced) and there are no underlying factors, the person who was in close contact would be asked to get a COVID test right away. This individual would not come into a testing site. They stay outside and a staff member retrieves their test from them. Until they receive their result, we ask that they remain off campus or, if the individual is a student, that they disengage from campus activities. If their result comes back negative, we ask them to get a second test 48 hours after their first test. If the second test is negative, they are cleared and there is no quarantine.

There are scenarios in which the process to be cleared has a higher bar, such as intimate partners who may have shared a water bottle. The process is determined by the contact tracers.

The vaccination rates are very high and we have not seen vaccinated individuals turn positive from contact with other vaccinated individuals. This is because the viral load is very low when an individual tests positive.

It is important to keep in mind that the health information of every member of our community is confidential. Do not share information about someone else's positive COVID results with others.

### **III. Teaching and Students**

- 1. Will we be "officially" informed of students who will need to switch and take a course online rather than in person and when they will be cleared to be back in the classroom or do we just rely on students sharing this with us?**

The contact tracers would reach out to student advisors. Advisors help to contact faculty to arrange for accommodations for the student to be absent from class. Faculty have been encouraged to record their lectures so that students can watch them if they need to isolate or quarantine. Students will also need to receive any materials they will require to keep up with the coursework.

- 2. For those of us who are teaching or who will soon be teaching, we hear there may be an adjustment to hybrid or remote learning if need be. What would Heller/Brandeis use as criteria to determine if this shift were going to become necessary?**

Brandeis will continue to respond to data as it emerges. At present, there is nothing that indicates a need to change our mode of operation, particularly with a community as protected as ours. Despite the Delta and emerging variants, Brandeis has a very low infection rate. (See [Brandeis' COVID-19 Dashboard](#)). Our vaccination rate is very high and we have a rigorous testing protocol and a mask mandate. If we were to experience a large cluster of positive cases, it is conceivable that we might decide to have everyone stay home for one or two weeks, but this is not under discussion right now because we are not currently in that situation.

There is a COVID-19 project management group at Brandeis that is well connected throughout the local community and that collaborates to develop recommendations based on data. The group sends regular reports to Ron, Stew, Carol, Bill, and Raymond who review the situation every week.

### **3. Are faculty able to switch from in-person teaching to remote teaching?**

Faculty may not unilaterally switch to remote teaching. If they test positive or are exposed to someone who tests positive, they will be advised on how to proceed from contract tracing. If there is a significant change in their situation that requires an accommodation, they will discuss that with the appropriate program director and HR and then any appropriate changes will be announced to the class. Some remote teaching may be appropriate for pedagogical reasons and, if so, that will be explained by the faculty member to the class.

## **IV. Office Space and Remote Work**

### **1. Can you please explain how office space is being allocated?**

Over the summer, we went through a planning process that was decentralized to academic programs, institutes/centers, and administrative support departments. This process was built upon the space allocation we conducted a few years ago, vetted through the Research Steering Committee (RSC) and the Education Steering Committee (ESC), looking at our existing footprint, projected growth and other factors. We also considered faculty and staff preferences that were illuminated by our March 2021 *Return to Heller* survey. All of this information helped to form three guiding principles for how we would use our space upon our return to the building: (1) Mission of the School; (2) Preferences for in-person and remote work; (3) Space constraints.

To date, our return to Heller, based on decentralized plans, has worked well. Each unit was asked to begin their return using their existing footprint at Heller. Individuals who use their offices three days or more per week on average are not required to share office space. In a few cases, research institutes or centers have needed more space due to their extraordinary growth, and they have been able to work with their neighbors on their floor to share space differently.

### **2. Given the high transmission rate of the Delta variant and additional potentially emerging variants, will staff who share offices or who are in cubicles in the main areas have the opportunity to move into single offices or to stagger the times that they are in the offices so they do not overlap with their office mates?**

Some departments (e.g. Admissions) already have a policy in place to stagger the times when staff are in the office, so that they do not overlap with each other in their office space. Many student-facing departments have worked out this kind of schedule. Where there are people meeting with students, we are making sure their spaces are being managed with the larger public health principles in mind. If you feel adjustments need to be made to your space or the space of your team, please speak with your supervisor or the person on your team who holds this responsibility.

- 3. With the unknowns about Delta and other emerging variants, is there now more openness to letting people (whose work role allows it) reduce the number of days they planned to be in the office, and if so, can this be more explicitly expressed?**

Over the summer, a planning process was implemented for returning to Heller in the fall. The planning took into account three priorities: (1) continuing to fulfill the mission of the Heller School; (2) preferences of individuals (and work-life balance); (3) efficient use of space (especially given Heller's pre-existing space shortage). Each unit at Heller developed a plan for its faculty and staff. Unit plans were reviewed by the dean and associate deans and then submitted to the university for approval. Any individual who would like to revise his or her personal plan should discuss the rationale and come to an agreement with their manager.

- 4. Are there new space use policies (such as around shared fridges, common areas, or meeting rooms) or new cleaning protocols that we should be aware of?**

Because the data on COVID-19 transmission suggests that the virus is not transmitted via surfaces, Brandeis is more relaxed on this issue. People may use refrigerators and microwaves, but we do recommend keeping individual items separate from each other to the extent possible. Of course, hand-washing, wiping surfaces, and keeping dishes clean are always good practices.