



GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Dear Graduate Students,

As we approach the colder months and are seeing significant and alarming increases in SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) infection rates in Wisconsin, I wanted to reach out to you to discuss what MCW is doing and what you can do to ensure the safety and well-being of our MCW community.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 earlier this year, MCW has implemented robust measures to mitigate the spread of the disease within our institution, and more detail about these policies and practices can be found on the [COVID-19 InfoScope page](#). Our institutional response has been based on CDC guidelines and consultation with local public health and MCW infectious disease experts. Some of the measures include:

- Surveillance testing for researchers and students in didactic learning. This testing was implemented in July and suggests a relatively low positivity rate among our asymptomatic learner population.
- When individuals who are positive for SARS-CoV-2 are identified, MCW has robust protocols to mitigate spread among our faculty, staff and students. To find out more information about contact tracing and what to expect if an individual is identified as positive for SARS-CoV-2, please see the [infographic](#) on InfoScope.
- To help mitigate disease transmission through the heating and cooling system, MCW Facilities has also been proactive about ensuring that air handling through our facilities meet or exceed federal guidelines; more information about these measures can be found in the [Facilities and Operations Guide](#) on InfoScope.

While MCW has taken numerous measures to mitigate disease transmission it is also critical that individuals do their part. With the increase in COVID-19 in Wisconsin, and with more and more activities moving indoors, it is important that we all double down on preventative measures. It almost goes without saying that if MCW infection rates increase, it will adversely affect all of us and negatively impact our ability to do research and education. We all need to do our part to help keep our MCW community healthy. Please pay attention to the following:

- 1. Face coverings (aka Masks) and Physical distancing.** Sars-CoV-2 is primarily a respiratory virus. Face covering and physical distancing are currently the only two interventions that have been shown to help mitigate the spread of the disease. Mask wearing is mandatory on MCW leased or owned properties. **Masks should at all times cover both your nose and your mouth.** I want to stress that both face mask wearing AND physical distancing are required. If you are in a room that has a door that closes, you can remove your mask only if you are alone in the room with the door closed. If there is more than one person in the room, each individual must wear a mask and remain at least 6 ft apart. If you are eating or drinking, you can remove your mask, but this must be done in an area that has been designated by the institution or your unit for eating, and where there is appropriate physical distancing in place.

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- 2. Close quarters work.** There are occasions, particularly in the lab, when it is necessary to briefly work within the 6 ft physical distancing guidance. In those cases, you should follow the close quarters work guidance from the [Office of Research](#)
- 3. If you are sick, stay home.** If you feel you have symptoms, STAY HOME, call your personal care provider, notify your advisor, and notify Angie Backus in the Graduate School (abackus@mcw.edu) or MCW HR at HR-Covid-Hotline@mcw.edu or 414-955-8347.
- 4. If you see something, say something.** If you see people who are not adhering to the [MCW Communicable Disease Policy](#) and safety guidelines, you should politely remind them of the guidelines in place. You can also use the [“Close-Call Form”](#) to confidentially report the noncompliance to Environmental Health and Safety.
- 5. Be safe outside MCW.** Contact tracing suggests that most of our graduate students who have tested positive have been infected outside of MCW. In addition to taking precautions within MCW, you should also be mindful of your potential for exposure outside of MCW. Bars, taverns and other indoor congregation spaces are higher risk. Please be mindful as you consider your social plans and bring the same vigilance to your activities outside MCW as inside.

This has been a difficult few months as we all live through this pandemic. We are worried about not only contracting the disease, but about taking our classes, getting our work done and the implications of all this for our futures. It is only natural that many of us are extremely stressed. The Graduate School is here to help support you. If you feel like you are having trouble coping, please reach out to the Graduate School or the MCW Office of Academic Affairs to help you find [resources](#).

Predictions from all reputable health experts and organizations are that there will be significant risk well into next year, with the most dangerous time being this fall and early winter. As we continue to work together over the next number of months, I ask you support each other. We are all in this together, and we need to look out for one another, and remember that our individual actions affect all of us.

Best Wishes,



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