



TO: Eastern Faculty, Staff and Students; Parents and Visitors  
From: Dr. Thomas Striplin, President  
Date: August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
SUBJECT: COVID 19 – Delta Variant and Return-to-Operations Status

The West Virginia Community and Technical College System and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission recently held a meeting with the COVID leadership team for the state and have made recommendations for institutions in response to the high infectivity rates of the delta variant of COVID 19. As everyone is well aware, the delta variant is highly contagious. This is primarily due to the high viral load in respiratory secretions, up to 1000 times higher which means it is 60x more transmissible as compared to the Alpha variant. This means that things like social distancing may be less effective in containing spread. The CDC estimates that the Delta variant is responsible for 82% of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. in mid-July, just two weeks after it became the country's dominant variant. West Virginia is seeing the same results.

Younger people are getting sicker with the delta variant, and they can become very ill very quickly. COVID-19 vaccines still offer strong protection against the Delta variant. But its high transmissibility means it is raising hospitalizations and death rates among unvaccinated people. Our WV hospitalizations are now at the highest level since mid-May and increasing daily. On July 27, 2021, the CDC revised their mask guidance in response to new scientific evidence associated with the Delta variant and rapidly rising cases in areas of the United States. West Virginia is now experiencing this increase associated with the Delta variant. To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, the CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission (As of 8/3/2021, 44 WV counties were considered having substantial or high transmission).

As a result of the high infectivity rate, we need to do everything we can to prepare for this variant and a possible spread especially with plans to reopen campus locations to students this month. Eastern's latest revision to its Return-to-Operations Plan Addendum 2: Summer/Fall Semester, released on 07/13/2021, did not require face coverings for vaccinated individuals on campus locations after a submission of proof of vaccination. With the spread of the Delta variant and the CDC's updated recommendations, we must reevaluate and take precautions when needed. At this time, we are still planning on reopening the campuses to students but **effective Monday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, ALL individuals who enter any of Eastern's locations MUST wear a face covering, vaccinated or unvaccinated.** This will extend to using the state vehicles for business travel purposes.

Eastern will continue implemented safety measures such as signing in at front lobby, safe distancing whenever possible, sanitizing stations, additional cleaning services and limited room occupancy based on numbers when necessary.

All other processes and recommendations discussed in the latest Return-to-Operations Plan, Addendum 2: Summer/Fall Semester will remain in place. Please review the plan which can be found at: <https://easternwv.edu/wp-content/uploads/New-RTO-Guidelines-071321.pdf>

I will continue to monitor the spread and impact of the Delta variant over the next week or two. Please continue to check the website, social media, and emails for any updates. If anyone is in need of a vaccine, please go to [www.vaccinefinder.org](http://www.vaccinefinder.org), locate a nearby vaccine site and make an appointment. You can also call the WV COVID Vaccine Hotline at 1-833-734-0965 and they will help schedule an appointment for you.