

Some Texas Baptist schools restore mask mandates

August 11, 2021

After Texas Baptist universities [relaxed pandemic-related restrictions](#) in May, at least two schools have reinstated modified mask mandates for the fall semester in light of a surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.

While other schools at this point are maintaining “mask-optional” policies, most indicated they are monitoring the situation closely and will make adjustments according to local conditions.

Masks required indoors at Wayland

Wayland Baptist University announced Aug. 5 all students, employees and guests—including those who are fully vaccinated—will be required to wear masks while inside buildings on the Plainview campus.

The requirement followed the July 27 recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that all individuals—including those who are vaccinated—wear face coverings indoors to reduce the spread of the contagious delta variant in areas identified as having substantial transmission rates.

Plainview and Hale County have been identified as having high transmission rates and a low percentage rate of vaccinated residents.

“Our efforts to closely follow CDC guidance have helped us to successfully navigate the pandemic and keep our campuses open and our employees and students healthy,” said Wayland President Bobby Hall.

COVID-19 testing will be available for all Wayland students and employees,

both on and off campus, and it will be required for residential students, student athletes and students in the performing arts. Anyone who has not been vaccinated is being encouraged to do so, and the school is strongly encouraging physical distancing and proper handwashing.

New student orientation at Wayland is scheduled Aug. 13, and classes are slated to begin Aug. 18.

ETBU requires masks in class and chapel

Five hundred miles east of Plainview, East Texas Baptist University also has modified its COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

Masks will be required of all individuals—including those who are vaccinated—when they are in ETBU classrooms, attending chapel services or inside the Sisk Health Services building.

At other indoor locations on campus, masks are required for people who are not fully vaccinated and recommended for all others.

“As COVID infections surge with the delta variant in Texas and in our region, East Texas Baptist University must adjust some of our health and safety protocols to provide even greater protection for our entire campus community,” ETBU President J. Blair Blackburn said.

“ETBU remains committed to providing an in-person, on-campus educational experience for our Tigers.”

As previously announced, classrooms and residence halls at ETBU will operate at full capacity. ETBU will observe in-person instruction, with virtual learning available only to students who have been infected or exposed to COVID-19 or symptomatic students who have been isolated or

quarantined by health services staff.

Vaccinations are “strongly encouraged” but not required at ETBU. On-campus vaccination clinics are offered during the first week of classes on Aug. 16, 18 and 20.

Teachers can request classroom masks at HBU

At Houston Baptist University, while the school does not have a campus-wide mask requirement, “faculty still reserve the right to request that students wear masks in class, especially those not fully vaccinated,” according to a policy [posted online](#) Aug. 10.

HBU is strongly encouraging—but not requiring—students to receive vaccinations, directing them to the free walk-in vaccination clinic at Memorial Hermann Southwest, adjacent to the campus.

“Our ability to return to normalcy depends on everyone doing their part to ensure their own safety and the safety of others,” the online policy states. “The most significant action you can take is to be fully vaccinated.”

All HBU classrooms and campus buildings will operate at 100 percent capacity.

“HBU will continue to clean spaces, provide PathoSans sanitizer in abundance to anyone who would like to perform additional sanitizing, and will continue using CIMR [Continuous Infectious Microbial Reduction] technology to help protect against the spread of COVID,” said John R. Holmes Jr., associate vice president for facilities and campus operations.

The [CIMR system](#) sanitizes air and surfaces throughout an indoor environment within 24 hours and then provides continuous protection from

airborne and surface infection.

Unvaccinated must mask indoors, be tested weekly at Baylor

Baylor University has not changed its May 17 position that allows fully vaccinated individuals to go without facemasks but requires those who have not been vaccinated to wear face coverings indoors.

While Baylor does not require its students, faculty or staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, those who submit confirmation of vaccination are exempt from mandatory weekly COVID-19 testing.

Masks recommended but not required elsewhere

At the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, students are encouraged but not required to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, and an on-campus vaccination clinic is scheduled Aug. 12-13. Otherwise, UMHB plans to continue “normal operations” in the fall semester.

“For the 2021-2022 academic year, as a general rule, students, employees, and guests are not required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, or report COVID-19 symptoms, exposure, or positive tests directly to UMHB. However, it is important for all of us to do our part to keep our campus community safe,” Brandon Skaggs, vice president for student life at UMHB, said in an email to students.

While face masks are optional, they are “strongly recommended” for individuals who are not fully vaccinated, and UMHB makes face coverings available at no cost to those who need them.

“Rest assured, the university will monitor local conditions carefully and will follow all directives issued by the state governor or other federal, state, or local health officials,” Skaggs wrote.

“Should the need arise for UMHB to change our mode of operations for any area of the university during the 2021-2022 academic year, including course delivery methods, we will communicate that as soon as possible.”

An Aug. 2 update on the Hardin-Simmons University [website](#) notes the school resumed normal operations May 8, and it will remain at 100 percent occupancy for indoor spaces “provided CDC guidelines do not change.”

“Masks will not be required on campus, although we do encourage them for all unvaccinated individuals. HSU does not currently require the COVID-19 vaccine, but we strongly encourage getting the vaccine if you have not done so already,” the website statement reads.

Baptist University of the Americas has not modified its protocols, which make masks optional but encouraged, particularly in weekly chapel services.

“We continue to monitor the situation in the city of San Antonio, paying special attention to any government directives relevant to containing the spread of COVID-19,” said Gabriel Cortés, chief of staff at BUA.

A Dallas Baptist University spokesman said the school remains committed to in-person events and in-classroom instruction during the fall semester and “at this stage” has not revised its policy that makes masks optional.

A spokesman for Howard Payne University said the Brownwood school will announce its COVID-19 protocols closer to the beginning of the fall semester.