

Texas Baptist schools continue adjusting to COVID-19

January 12, 2022

As [cases](#) of the highly contagious omicron COVID-19 variant continue to increase exponentially, some Texas Baptist universities have adjusted their health and safety policies—at least for the early weeks of the spring semester.

In addition to dealing with concerns regarding student health, most of the schools also are subject to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's [emergency temporary standard](#), which requires employers with 100 or more employees to ensure their personnel are vaccinated or tested weekly and that they wear a mask on the job.

While the U.S. Supreme Court is considering legal challenges to the OSHA requirement, it remains in effect at this point.

Testing requirements

Baylor University will open its residence halls on Jan. 13 and resume classes in person on Jan. 18, but every student—vaccinated or not—living on campus will be required to take a Baylor-provided COVID-19 test within 24 hours of moving into a residence hall.

Unvaccinated students, faculty and staff will be required to take COVID-19 tests twice weekly for at least the first two weeks of the spring semester.

Baylor requires everyone to wear face coverings in classrooms and labs, in private offices when requested and in other indoor locations where social distancing is not possible.

The university's health management team worked with the Baylor President's Council and external experts to develop a health and safety plan for the spring semester, [President Linda Livingstone announced Jan. 3.](#)

"The COVID-19 vaccines, especially with a booster, remain the best protection available against serious reactions to the omicron variant. The bottom line is that we believe the safest place for our faculty, staff and students from omicron is on the Baylor campus due to our high vaccination rates, availability of testing and following public health protocols," Livingstone stated.

"With that said, we will begin the semester by continuing our COVID-19 precautionary measures from the fall through at least the end of January as we closely follow the spike and projected decline of this latest variant."

Mask requirements reinstated

Effective Jan. 10, Wayland Baptist University reinstated its mask-wearing requirement indoors for all employees and students at locations across all its campuses.



Wayland Baptist University student Eliana Vaughn dons a face mask while on campus. (Wayland Baptist

University Photo)

In addition to its traditional residential campus in Plainview, Wayland also has campuses in San Antonio, Amarillo, Lubbock and Wichita Falls, as well as in Albuquerque, N.M.; Phoenix and Sierra Vista, Ariz.; Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska; and Kapolei, Hawaii.

In November, Wayland had relaxed its mask requirement for fully vaccinated individuals, except in places where local mandates dictated face coverings. The school continued to require masks to be worn by those who are not fully vaccinated.

However, the situation changed by the time Wayland posted a [Jan. 7 online update](#).

“Statistically and in the opinion of many medical authorities, it seems clear today that the COVID surge being seen in other parts of America is now coming to the communities Wayland serves,” the update on the Wayland website states.

“We are clearly seeing the front of this wave which authorities believe will be the most significant one yet. Simultaneously, we will soon welcome students returning to our campuses from all across the nation and around the world, heightening the likelihood of greater virus transmission.”

While the Wayland update expressed hope the latest COVID-19 wave would be “of relatively short duration,” it also advised students to watch for further updates and to begin preparing for remote online instruction if that were required.

At East Texas Baptist University, all faculty, staff and students will be required to wear masks inside campus buildings until at least Jan. 21.

“We will continue to evaluate the regional situation and provide updated

protocols by January 21,” ETBU President J. Blair Blackburn stated in a [Jan. 7 announcement on the university website](#).

“By being proactive and cautious, we have kept infection rates within our ETBU Family very low, and we have been able to maintain vibrant connections with one another and active campus life,” Blackburn continued. “We remain steadfast to this commitment. I appreciate your support and diligence in keeping our campus community and loved ones safe by wearing a mask.”

Continue to monitor and adjust

At Houston Baptist University, officials urge students, faculty and staff to receive vaccinations and boosters. Facility services continues to sanitize campus buildings, and CIMR (Continuous Infectious Microbial Reduction) machines are operating in many campus classrooms and offices.

“Our Husky Strong Task Force will also continue to monitor the progression of the Omicron variant in our area and on campus to make additional adjustments as needed throughout the semester,” a [Jan. 6 update on the HBU website states](#).

John Holmes, associate vice president for facilities and campus operations, said in a Jan. 11 email, masking on campus remains optional, except when recommended as part of the Centers for Disease Control post-quarantine procedure.

“Our expectation is to begin classes on January 18 as normal, on campus, and in person,” he wrote. “The university also does not currently have any testing requirements beyond those imposed by the NCAA on student athletes.”

[The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor](#) lifted its mask-wearing and social

distancing requirement effective May 20, 2021, and it has not changed its policies at this point. While vaccinations are not required, they are strongly encouraged.

“The university will carefully monitor local conditions and follow all directives issued by the state governor or other federal, state or local health officials,” said Ashley Smith, director of marketing and public relations at UMHB.

[Hardin-Simmons University](#) requires all employees who are not fully vaccinated to wear a face covering and undergo regular COVID-19 testing beginning Feb. 9. However, wearing face masks is optional and up to the individual discretion of HSU students.

Face coverings remain optional for students, faculty and staff at Dallas Baptist University and Howard Payne University.

DBU released the following statement: “DBU is committed to continuing in-class learning and all on-campus activities throughout the spring semester, and as such, we are monitoring our campus health and are working closely with health care professionals to provide access to testing and vaccines.”

For students who test positive for COVID-19 and need to quarantine, DBU makes available remote synchronous learning.

A Howard Payne University spokesman said its current policies proved effective during the fall semester.

At Baptist University of the Americas, students are not required—but are encouraged—to wear face coverings, except when recommended by the CDC after a positive test and quarantine. Vaccination is optional. BUA asks students to self-report any international travel.

Stark College and Seminary recommends masks and vaccines, but they are

not required for staff or students. COVID-19 testing is not mandatory at this time.

“We have provided students options for either in-person classes or via Zoom. In-person classes have enrollment caps so that we can ensure adequate social distancing for all participants,” said Chris Stapper, vice president for marketing and finance.