



HEALTHY TOGETHER

Classes begin two weeks from today, and we welcome 640 new students to campus next week. The excitement of a new school year is at hand.

As much as we might wish otherwise, COVID cases are still at hand as well. Rates of new infections are high in northwest Georgia and across most of the southeast.

We know the possibility of rapid spread will be significant during the first two weeks of the semester, as people arrive at Berry from many different locations. This reality is not alarming in the way that it was last August or in August 2020. Hospitalization rates today are modest (29 in the two Rome hospitals) compared to a year ago when the number was more than 200. Still, we should not be complacent given the high infection rates and fatigue associated with the BA.5 and BA.4 subvariants of the Omicron variant.

In previous years, colleges and universities implemented policies and procedures (“rules”) designed to restrict the spread of COVID. Some even chose to close their residential operations. At Berry, we emphasized two priorities — the health and well-being of our residential community and making the most of an in-person educational experience — and sought to maintain a balance between the two.

While COVID mitigation **rules** were helpful during the long crisis period, our long-term approach must focus on personal **responsibility**, for our own health and for the health of our community.

In practical terms, what does this mean? Be attentive to your own symptoms and to moments of potential exposure, and then be proactive in testing for COVID (and other viruses) and protecting others when you are infected.

Guidelines for Fall 2022

Testing

Take an at-home test prior to coming back to campus. The risk of spread is high when people first return to campus. Once the campus environment is stabilized, the risk of rapid spread is reduced.

- If you are experiencing symptoms, please do not return to campus while you are ill with COVID or any other virus. Please continue to test until you are symptom free and your test is negative. If you are delayed a few days, call or email (deanofstudents@berry.edu; (706) 236-2207) and we will assist with the transition.

If you develop any symptoms (including those of a common cold), take an at-home test. If your initial test is negative, you may still need to repeat the test for several days.

- Test kits for students are available at the Health Center on campus.
- Test kits are readily available at no cost at <https://www.covid.gov/tests> (order at least two weeks in advance). Additionally, many health insurance plans cover the costs for tests that you purchase at pharmacies.

If you test positive, you will need to isolate from other people until you test negative. Students will have the option to remain in their rooms or return home. If you need to leave your room, you will be required to wear KN94 or 95 masks when around others.)

- If you test positive, you should let your close contacts know so they can be careful as well. There will not be any formal contact tracing on campus.

Vaccines

We continue to strongly encourage vaccinations and boosters against COVID-19. The evidence is clear that staying up-to-date with vaccines and boosters reduces the likelihood of serious complications for people of all age groups.

- An updated booster that targets the BA-5 subvariant should be available by early October. Berry will likely again sponsor a booster clinic on campus this fall.

Masks

Many of us have a love-hate relationship with masks. Still, high-quality masks (e.g., N95, KN95, and KN94) are an effective shield against viruses (including COVID) if worn appropriately. We encourage people to use them when:

- experiencing symptoms of illness,
- concerned about being in a crowded place,
- at particular risk of infection (e.g., immunocompromised), or
- wanting to be healthy in preparation for a special event (wedding, travel)

Please bring several masks with you to campus. There may be occasions on campus where you will be asked to wear them for a particular event or class.

- Masks will also be available to students as needed through the health center.

COVID BY THE NUMBERS

For more than a year (in 2021 and 2022), we provided weekly updates regarding comparative statistics involving the number of cases in local hospitals, the number of new cases locally and in GA, and the percentage of positive tests locally and in GA.

As testing has moved from primarily PCR tests to at-home tests, metrics that we were tracking are less consistent and thus difficult to interpret reliably.

For fall of 2022, we will no longer maintain our COVID tracking webpage or report COVID by the numbers. However, we will continue to monitor COVID cases on campus as well as locally and adjust our procedures and protocols as warranted.

Enjoy the waning days of summer as we look forward to a brilliant fall.
