

MELISSA NOBLES

Chancellor

MIT's plans for the spring semester

January 18, 2022

Highlights

- The Omicron wave challenged MIT, but is now receding both on campus and locally.
- Most employees are expected to return to their fall semester work arrangements on January 31.
- The new semester is expected to begin with in-person learning.
- Ninety percent of students and employees accessing campus have received booster shots.
- Current restrictions on events and visitors remain in effect, but will be reassessed soon.
- Regular COVID testing continues for now, but may soon transition to optional testing.
- Due to ongoing uncertainty, all DLCs and instructors should develop continuity plans.
- MIT Now has updated guidance for those who are exposed to COVID or test positive.

To the members of the MIT community:

We write to share our plans for the spring semester, which begins on Monday, January 31.

We expect to return at that time to operations resembling those of the fall semester. This will include the return of all classes to in-person learning, and the return of most employees to the schedules and work arrangements that were in place before our December pivot, as the Omicron variant was beginning its surge in the Boston area.

Omicron has challenged MIT, along with many other places. Since we wrote in December, fully 8% of the members of our community – more than 2,500 of our colleagues and friends – have tested positive for COVID. But your remarkable persistence during this tough phase of the pandemic has helped the Institute continue to pursue its academic and research mission.

Even as MIT enters a once-unimaginable fifth semester of managing through COVID, there is much cause for hope: We went into the Omicron surge with 98% of those on our campus vaccinated, and 90% of students and employees who have been accessing campus have now received booster shots. Thanks to this strong level of protection, most cases at MIT in recent weeks have been mild, and we are not aware of any that have led to hospitalization. With the added protection of masking, we can continue to learn and work together in our campus buildings.

The incidence of COVID on our campus has declined sharply since the peak we experienced during the last week of December and the first week of January, echoing a decrease across the Boston area. Just as importantly, our campus operations have withstood the recent wave of infections and absences, thanks to the changes implemented last month to reduce our on-campus population, encourage remote work, modify our plans for IAP, and streamline our contact tracing and isolation procedures.

It is for these reasons that we feel confident continuing the gradual ramp-up in the campus population that has been underway as students have returned during IAP. And based on current trends, we hope to further relax our pandemic protocols in the weeks and months to come: As Omicron recedes – and we continue to shift our focus from reducing the number of cases to mitigating severe health consequences – it's likely that MIT will follow many of our peers in transitioning away from required regular COVID testing, while continuing to offer optional on-demand testing for those who are exposed to COVID or have symptoms. In the coming weeks, we will also reassess our current restrictions on events (food and drink remain prohibited for now) and visitors (access to most buildings remains limited). For now, indoor masking is still required on campus, in keeping with the City of Cambridge's mask mandate.

While the trends are looking favorable at this moment, we have all learned from this pandemic that conditions can change at any time. We have developed fallback positions just in case we see an unexpected reversal in the coming weeks, and encourage all instructors and departmental leaders to develop their own continuity plans.

To assist in the return to greater in-person operations, we have updated our resources for undergraduate and graduate students, employees, and instructors. The DoingWell site offers key support resources for students, and the Human Resources site has guidance about pandemic pay policies and leaves, information about

available support, and FAQs for employees. And, because we are not yet out of the woods with Omicron, we remind you that MIT Now features detailed instructions for those who are exposed to COVID, or test positive, at this point in the pandemic.

We hope that these developments will come as welcome news. These recent weeks have been a struggle for all of us: Many of us have found it difficult to deal with this latest season of isolation from friends and colleagues. Many of us have been infected with COVID, or have loved ones who received a positive result. Many of us are facing disruptions in our personal lives, as schools and childcare centers have closed anew.

We'd like to thank all of you for your ongoing patience and perseverance over nearly two years, as our community has worked together to steer MIT through this unprecedented global event. We simply could not have maintained our world-changing work without this remarkable team effort.

With appreciation,

Ramona Allen, Vice President for Human Resources

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