

December 10, 2021

Good Afternoon,

As we enter the season of parties, celebrations, and gatherings with friends, family, and co-workers, we want to remind everyone to remain vigilant about the risk of COVID-19 transmission in social situations. Oneida County has recently issued a [mask mandate in public locations](#) as well as additional requirements for social gatherings due to very high positivity rates in our community. Our experience at SUNY Poly has shown that social gatherings and family transmissions have been the primary causes of COVID-19 exposures and illnesses for employees and students. Exposures during potluck meals and celebratory parties on and off campus without adequate COVID-19 precautions in place have recently created difficult situations for our community, impacting many individuals who were identified as close or proximate contacts of COVID-positive individuals. These individuals ate and drank near individuals who within a day became ill with COVID-19.

Though we don't want to limit the festive atmosphere and collegiality that gathering provides, we do want to remind everyone of the expectations and best practices that could prevent the spread of COVID-19 on our campus, and protect our employees as the holiday season continues. Many of us can remember last year's holiday season and the isolation and quarantine restrictions that were endured—some for as many as 45 days due to repeated family exposures.

If people gather, we ask that participants consider the following:

- a. Not all of our employees are vaccinated. Unvaccinated individuals are expected to follow the CDC guidelines of masking and social distancing when eating and drinking and in social situations.
- b. Spaces should be large enough to accommodate both the unvaccinated individual distancing, and allow for social distancing of others who will also have their masks off during eating and drinking. Room seating setups should maximize the space between individuals with a goal of at least 6-foot distance, if possible.
- c. Eating and drinking should be done while seated so that distances can be maintained, and interactions may be limited to small numbers of people (versus the mingling of a party where all may be exposed by one individual).
- d. Consider holding the meal in a large space—not a break room or office.
- e. Consider plating food and then eating in offices or areas separated from each other.
- f. Have separate rooms for food / drink service and eating/drinking.
- g. Grab and Go type food offerings are encouraged, as well as pre-wrapped items so people do not pick through food items.
- h. Service of food with common utensils is not recommended. People should use their own utensils if possible, or change out service utensils every few people.
- i. Hand sanitizing and hand washing facilities should be close by and used.

- j. As with any potluck food preparation, please ensure hot foods are kept hot, cold foods are kept cold, and, if sick, do not prepare any foods for sharing. General food preparation safety practices should be followed.
- k. If an individual is sick, they should not attend.
- l. All participants should keep in mind who they spend time eating/drinking near or talking to with consideration for the length of time (15 minutes total in 24-hours) and distance—within six feet. Six feet is the width of an open door plus three more feet (another door), a king sized bed, the width of a sedan, a yoga mat, for a six-foot tall person - the distance between finger tips when arms are stretched out to the sides.

Thank you for continuing to follow the guidelines and restrictions in place. You are helping to keep SUNY Poly a safe place to learn and work. Have a safe and healthy holiday season.

Human Resources Department
Environmental Health & Safety Office - Utica