Fellow Saints,

As you are likely aware, last week on June 11, the Governor moved the State of Illinois into Phase 5 of the Restore Illinois framework – often referred to as the full re-opening plan. Since the pandemic started, we all have longed for this day… and it is certainly time to celebrate! This milestone response to the COVID-19 pandemic was reached after observing continued statewide declines in virus transmission (primarily noted through substantial drops in positivity testing rates) and significant progress in vaccine administration amongst the adult population. It appears all indicators are trending in the right direction.

On our campus, we have not had a positive COVID case since February. You have done an EXCELLENT job of adhering to our COVID mitigation protocols and following healthcare guidelines, and I THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart for all you’ve done to keep yourself, our employees, our students, and our community safe.

That said, I know you have waited with great anticipation for me to announce new College safety procedures in light of the Governor’s order last week. I’m sorry this communication has taken me a moment to get to you, but I needed to evaluate all available guidance and consider several contingencies before I could provide you with accurate, well thought-out, and thorough guidance. To that end, please, carefully consider the following information.

First, understand that Phase 5 “FULL REOPENING” doesn’t mean we can operate like we did before the pandemic. On the contrary, full reopening means we are operating under safety protocols that define our environment as a “*new normal*.” I know this can be confusing so let me provide some context. Here is an excerpt from the Governor’s news release:

“*after a tremendously challenging year, Illinois has now reached a defining moment in our efforts to defeat COVID-19… Illinois will soon resume life as we knew it before – returning to events, gatherings, and a fully reopened economy, with some of the safety guidelines we’ve adopted still in place*.”

Obviously, the Governor describes resuming to life as we knew it before (the pandemic) but also alludes to some additional safety guidelines. To get a full understanding of the State’s guidelines, I encourage you to review the [Restore Illinois Phase 5 Guidance](https://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/COVID19/Illinois%20Phase%205%20Guidelines.pdf) document (follow the link provided). Relevant parts of this guidance states,

*“for indoor businesses and venues where everyone present is not fully vaccinated,* ***unvaccinated persons should wear a face covering and maintain six feet social distance****. Businesses and venues* ***may*** *continue to* ***require face coverings and/or social distancing****. At outdoor businesses and venues, unvaccinated persons may choose not to wear a face covering when able to maintain a six-foot social distance while outdoors, unless required to do so by a business or municipality*.” This guidance goes on to say, “*individuals in schools, day care settings, and educational institutions should continue to follow separate guidance issued by the Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and Illinois Department of Public Health*.”

After reviewing Phase 5 guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), and talking with several government officials throughout the State, it has become clear to me that the guidelines being issued by these organizations are “*intentionally vague*” so we might have some flexibility to customize our protocols, as needed… essentially the decisions are ours to make.

After consultation with many individuals, effective June 21, here are our new protocols…

**Masking**

* Those who are fully vaccinated are no longer required to wear masks in most indoor spaces or outdoors when on campus.
* Anyone who is not fully vaccinated, **regardless of the reason**, is required to continue to **PROPERLY** wear a mask indoors.
* Anyone who is not fully vaccinated, **regardless of the reason**, is required to continue to **PROPERLY** wear a mask outdoors, if around others.
* While masks are no longer required for those who are vaccinated in most indoor spaces on campus, many will choose to continue wearing a mask for their own personal comfort, and the community is expected to support their choices.
* There may be indoor events during which masks will be required more broadly.
* We will make informed decisions about masking requirements as we monitor campus and local health trends and adjust guidelines where appropriate.

**Capacity Limits**

* Capacity limits and restrictions for classrooms, meetings, and events have been lifted.
* Everyone (including vaccinated individuals) might be required to wear masks at specific types of indoor events.
* As noted above, unvaccinated individuals must continue to wear masks at all indoor events and meetings.

**Social Distancing**

* Anyone who is not fully vaccinated, must maintain a six-foot physical distance between people.
* Fully vaccinated people are encouraged to maintain a six-foot physical distance when possible.
* Large activities, events, and gatherings could be held outdoors, if desired and where possible.
* Virtual activities, events, and gatherings can be used to promote physical distancing.
* Communal space (e.g. classrooms, gyms, lounges, education center, and cafeteria) will be configured to allow for spaces for unvaccinated people.
* Anyone using campus buses must ensure a six-foot physical distance.

**Other**

* Symptom Screening (i.e. daily temperature checks) will continue.
* Testing protocols are still in effect.
* Quarantine and isolation procedures are still in effect.
* Contact tracing procedures and guidelines will continue.
* Documenting your vaccination status is encouraged but not required.
* Stringent cleaning protocols remain in effect.
* The plexiglass barrier at the Front Desk will stay, all others can be removed if desired.
* New masking signs will be posted as soon as they are available.

If you are an employee and have questions about any of these protocols, please consult with your supervisor. If you are a student or community member and have questions about any of these protocols, please contact Dr. Kristin Shelby at 618.634.3240 or by email at kristins@shawneecc.edu.

In addition, if you have not already done so, please consider getting vaccinated if you are medically able to do so. As data on the vaccines have emerged, it appears, for the most part, they have been proven to be a safe and effective way to protect yourself (and others), which is why I made the personal choice to be vaccinated. At our COVID-19 webpage (<https://shawneecc.edu/statements-concerning-covid-19>) you can find information and links to organizations that will provide vaccines to any Illinois resident age 12 and older, or visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> for more information.

Finally, as much as we welcome Phase 5 here at SCC, we must be vigilant in the fact that others are facing difficulties, and if the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that circumstances can change. Therefore, please know we will continue to monitor the situation, adjust as needed and post updates to our [COVID-19 webpage](https://shawneecc.edu/statements-concerning-covid-19). While our efforts to address the effects of the pandemic continue, entering Phase 5 is awesome news and provides more reason for great hope and celebration.

Rejoice and take care,

Tim