

**JESSICA WITHERS:** Thank you all for being here. Thanks for making the time today. I'll point out the meeting is being recorded and live transcription is available.

The first thing I'd like us to do is to acknowledge the land we're on here in Ithaca. Cornell University is located on the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:no', the Cayuga Nation. The Gayogohó:no' are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land.

The Confederacy precedes the establishment of Cornell University, New York state, and the United States of America. We acknowledge the painful history of Gayogohó:no' dispossession and honor the ongoing connection of Gayogohó:no' people, past and present, to these lands and waters.

So again, welcome. I see we still have people joining. Thank you all. I'm Jessica Withers and I serve as chair of the Employee Assembly for this term. I'd like to welcome you to today's staff forum, "COVID in the New Semester: A Panel Discussion."

The Employee Assembly represents and is concerned with matters directly affecting the community of Cornell employees. As the spring semester started, some schools were able to host town halls with senior leadership. But senior leadership in the Employee Assembly came together to create this opportunity for all staff to hear the latest updates on the spring semester.

With us today, I will introduce our panelists. With us today, are Peter Frazier, the Eleanor and Howard Morgan Professor, Operations Research and Information Engineering. Peter?

**PETER FRAZIER:** Hi, everybody. It's great to be here and to be able to talk with all of you. I help with the mathematical modeling, which supports decisions here at the university in response to COVID.

**JESSICA WITHERS:** Thanks, Pete. Thanks Peter. Next we have Gary Koretzky, Vice Provost for Academic Integration.

**GARY KORETZKY:** Great. Well, thank you very much for the invitation to join. I'm also a professor of medicine at Weill Cornell. And I've met many of you, I think, virtually, at least, and some in person over the last now many, many months. We've been through an awful lot together.

My role in this has been to try to help coordinate our efforts around the pandemic, thinking about how to do testing and how to think about how the virus is affecting the campus. And importantly, to watch as things are unfolding so that we can pivot, and make new decisions, and try to stay one step ahead as much as we possibly can.

I know that this has been a long road for all of us. Hopefully we're seeing quite a bit of light at the end of the tunnel. I think we'll talk about changes today that are upcoming. And so I'm really, really appreciative to have this opportunity, so thank you very much.

**JESSICA WITHERS:** Thank you, Gary. We have Mary Opperman, Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer. Mary will speak in a few minutes. And we have Mike Kotlikoff, Provost. Mike, would you like to speak?

**MIKE  
KOTLIKOFF:**

Thanks, Jessica. Yeah, I'll just say a few words of introduction. First of all, I want to just thank everyone on this call. I want to thank you, not just for being here, but also for everything you've done up until now.

We know that we've asked an awful lot of everyone. We know that areas are understaffed or have been understaffed during this period of pandemic. People have really stepped up in the university.

And I just want to extend my really sincere gratitude for everything that you have done, as well as what you're going to continue to do, because we're not completely out of this yet. And a lot of people are still stressed, and we know that, and we thank you for it.

So just say a couple of words. First of all, this, as Jessica said, is part of a communication strategy. We've tried to not just have university-wide town halls but go to individual colleges, and now go to staff that are not necessarily part of individual colleges and have a direct communication and answer questions as we think about a change in our strategy associated with changing conditions.

So let me just say a couple of brief words about that those changes. Much of course you know already. Omicron is more infectious than other variants, previous variants. But also we're in a different position in the sense that so much, so high a proportion of our community is vaccinated, and vaccinated, and boosted.

And that provides us with the opportunity to shift our strategy a little bit less from originally, which was to try and eliminate virus on campus, really to understand that virus is going to be on campus, to limit its health effects, and to control its level.

And so that's the basic underlying reason for the changes that we've made. And those changes were just generally, first of all, as you know, to go online for the first couple of weeks.

And the reason for that was to make sure that in this early phase, as people came back to the campus, when we expected most infections to occur or the prevalence to be as high as it was going to be, that we had as little academic disruption as possible so people could take their classes online if they were diagnosed as positive or not, or detected as positive. And that seems to have worked very well.

A second part of that strategy was to detect as many people as possible as quickly as possible. So we had a pre-departure testing process that tried to detect people and keep them from coming until they were negative, and then an immediate entry testing process. Many of those were by antigen tests, which allowed us to immediately detect positives and isolate them.

All of that seems to have gone very, very well. We've had fewer cases on campus than was predicted by our modeling, by Peter's groups modeling. So we had a really good start to the semester.

And then of course, in the beginning of the semester, our strategy was to go back to intensively surveilling, or surveilling at a high level, particularly our undergraduate population and student-facing employees so as to limit the spread of any returning virus as much as possible.

And that seems to have gone pretty well. We're at a very manageable level of cases on campus. And as I say, our goal is not to eliminate it. We know we're going to have cases on campus, but prevalence in our community is dropping, prevalence nationally is dropping. And so far we feel like we're in pretty good shape.

We also at the same time want to pivot from a focus on detecting cases and isolating individuals to thinking about health and focusing more on making sure that we don't have negative health consequences.

We've been very fortunate in that regard. We've had no serious student health consequences since the beginning of the pandemic, no hospitalizations related to COVID. I know on the staff side that's not true. But our serious health consequences have been fairly low. We want to maintain that.

To do that, we've of course upgraded our recommendation about masks. We have higher quality masks on campus. That is our expectation that people wear those and use those. We've altered our dining procedures to try and make that safer in this beginning phase. And then we, in the beginning phase, we limited social activities as well.

Now we're just coming out of that. And we're moving towards more normal dining procedures. We've pivoted to supplemental testing and symptomatic testing. And we've stood up-- and Gary can describe more the symptomatic testing that has been stood up.

All of this, again, is a shift to recognizing that we're focusing on living with a situation that is going to be with us for some time. So with that, I'd love to get into the specifics of your questions. But first, I'd like to ask our tremendous Vice President of Human Resources, Mary Opperman, to say a few words.

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:**

Thank you, Mike. That's very nice of you. I'm glad that's recorded, tremendous.

[LAUGHTER]

Welcome all of you--

**MIKE  
KOTLIKOFF:**

Stupendous and tremendous.

[LAUGHTER]

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:**

--and Happy Friday. In the roller coaster of February weather, I liked yesterday better than today, but that's the way it goes in the Northeast. I just want to add my thanks to those that you've heard already.

I've been reflecting lately on the last two years and how I'm really glad I didn't know two years ago that we would still be doing this two years later, because I think it would have been hard to-- I think the optimism of thinking every so often that we were turning a corner was actually the best way to get through something we didn't understand.

But with that said, I do think that we're in a new place, and hopefully a good trajectory for the future, as Mike's explained, as this virus has changed and mutated and we've changed our policies to go along with it.

And I can't help but reflect on how that feels to all of us. We set up a set of-- we had no idea what to do in a pandemic. I mean, one of the things I would say is you can do all the tabletops and preparatory in the world, and when something like this pandemic comes, you really are in many ways kind of figuring it out as you go along.

And so what we did in 2020 was pretty massive in terms of writing up guidelines, and figuring out what to do, and talking to all of you, and kind of working out questions together. And then we would hit a lull and we'd sort of relax things. And then Delta came and things changed again. And then Omicron, and things changed again.

And each time we did that, we did it-- you all had to change, testing, no testing, lots of testing, less testing, masks, boosters, vaccines. And we don't all like every element of the decisions, but I just want to say I just couldn't be prouder of the community that I have the privilege of being part of. You've been fantastic.

I know that many of you have dealt with issues yourself and issues in your family. I think the future-- we'll find out in the future the long-term impacts of having had two years of this on ourselves and on the communities in which we participate, on our children, and what that's-- the impact it's had on them.

So the future is unknown as well. But I'm optimistic that if the community continues to stay together and voice its comments and questions in the amazingly constructive way that you all do, that we'll find the future pathway the way we found our way through this.

So it's just a long way of saying thank you. I know it's been rough, but it would have been so much more difficult if you all hadn't been here with us and going on this journey with us. So with that, I'm going to turn it back to Jessica.

**JESSICA  
WITHERS:**

Thank you, Mary. I am grateful to be among Cornell's staff through this time too. I think my colleagues are the best. We will now move to the question and answer segment of the forum. Questions can be submitted through the Q&A module there in Zoom. We also have some presubmitted questions staff sent in ahead of time.

Employee Assembly Executive Vice Chair, Andrea Haenlin-Mott has been keeping an eye on the questions and she will be moderating. Andrea, are you ready?

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

Great. Thanks, Jessica. There are a number of presubmitted questions that a lot of it is all around the-- a number of them related to mask mandates at the state level and what impact that will have on campus and what the thoughts are for-- a lot of interest in lifting the use of masks indoors.

Gary, would you be able to address this particular question that is sort of multi-themed and was asked about 27 different ways. But if you could address that particular issue, that would be helpful.

**GARY  
KORETZKY:**

Sure. So I'll take a crack at it and ask my colleagues to help, but also, Andrea, if you want clarity from what I say, please ask me again. Because it is a very, very complicated question, right? So I'll just start with a few things that seemed quite clear.

And one is that in a time when there's a lot of transmission of virus, wearing a high-quality mask matters, right? That is known. That's clear. It matters if the person with the virus wears a quality mask. And it also matters if the person who doesn't have the virus but is in the vicinity of that individual is wearing a high-quality mask. So masks do reduce transmission.

So the policy that we put in place for this semester was one where there was a requirement for people to wear masks indoors and, in particular, to wear high-quality masks. That requirement is consistent with Tompkins County's health department's recommendation.

And just so you know, that we talk frequently. So I talk with the director of the health department on a weekly basis. And this topic comes up every week. And Tompkins County Health is following current CDC guidelines.

And those guidelines say that if you're an area where there's a high level of transmission of virus, and that's described by or defined by the CDC as more than 50 cases a week per 100,000 population, then there is a recommendation for indoor masking.

And we're in that state. So although case counts in Tompkins County have gone down dramatically, they are still greater than 50 cases per 100,000 people per week. So that is our county recommendation.

Right now, Cornell is following that recommendation as well. That case counts have come down. Case counts are lower than what we would have projected the very beginning of the semester. However there still is viral transmission on campus. And so there is clearly a benefit to people by wearing masks, as onerous as that is.

And it's really appreciated that people don't want to have to be wearing masks. But inside enclosed spaces when there are people that are together, it still makes a lot of sense for people to wear high-quality masks. That's not to say that this will be the policy forever, right, that this is where we are right now.

As I think we've intimated, that we review what we're doing on a very, very frequent basis. One of my best friends at Cornell has become Peter Frazier. We talk every day, sometimes multiple times a day. And it's really thinking these things through, watching what's happening, and trying as hard as we can to do the following.

Number one is provide the best protection for people on campus. This is still a serious virus, but also disrupt lives the minimum amount that we can. And so that's the whole purpose of Mike described for minimizing the disruption of academics by starting online and then having people be able to come back to classes.

That's still what we're thinking about with masks, that if we can minimize the transmission, people will be able to do more of what they really want to do at Cornell, recognizing it's still not optimal. Not sure Andrea if that answered your question. That's the best I can do at this moment.

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:**

Can I add something, Andrea? So I also want to say that we all expect that a time will be coming where masks will not be mandated. And for many, many people, that is a welcome-- that will be a welcome change.

I just want to say I also hear quite a bit from people for whom their mask is really important to them. They have personal lives that are theirs. People in their families, maybe their own health condition, any number of reasons why that mask provides safety.

So I think in the future, as we-- I mean, enduring into the future, many countries use masks on a regular basis. You're sick, you put your mask on.

And I would just encourage us, as we think about the future, to recognize that the freedom of somebody to choose to wear a mask when they're no longer mandated. We will also want to respect and give grace to the fact that people should be able to make that choice without fear of being denigrated in any way.

**GARY  
KORETZKY:**

If I could just add to both of those comments just a general point. One of the things that I think that's characterized Cornell's response throughout the pandemic is turning to people like Peter Frazier and asking for a rationale, a scientific rationale using the best, if imperfect, information that we have to make decisions.

This is one of those areas where we'll turn to Peter and ask what the risk is for changing our mask policy. We'll look at where our transmission is at the time, what the risk is if we remove it, understanding that we're not going to tell anyone they can't wear a mask.

What we will do at some point is change our mask policy so that it's not mandatory. And we'll do that based on scientific information.

**PETER FRAZIER:** Towards science, I'll just add that we published a report on the website where we have all of our epidemiological reports looking at in part the effectiveness of masking. And as Gary described, they are actually quite effective at reducing transmission of the virus. So I'll post a link to that. And if you'd like to get into details and read some of that science, you can.

**ANDREA HAENLIN-MOTT:** So as a follow-up to the existing mask mandate, there are a number of questions about people continuing to not wear masks. Some of the students and some frustration that people have in trying to continue to have students wear them, or they've noticed that they'll be in an eating setting, then when they're not in the eating setting any longer, they'll walk away and still not have their masks available.

Or one additional question just came back about the use of masks on TCAT or other bus types of things. I think this is an ongoing thing that I've seen all of you address at different times. I just didn't know if there's any ongoing suggestions and guidance that you can provide to folks because it seems to be an ongoing concern.

**GARY KORETZKY:** Andrea, maybe I'll just take a crack at this. I think that this is similar to what we've been facing throughout the pandemic, and that is that we're a community, and we are relying very much on members of the community to be respectful of concerns of others.

There was, in the beginning of the pandemic, a lot of messaging about how you could communicate with your colleague. And those messages still are the case. People are getting very tired of wearing masks and often people are uncomfortable asking somebody else to do something that perhaps they're not doing.

But again, I think gentle reminders are still appropriate. And I have been pretty-- I've been very impressed actually with the effectiveness of that. And it is difficult. And we're moving into a phase of the pandemic where people are exhausted. They would like things to be like they were in 2017. And they will be again. But we just need a little bit more time.

And hopefully people will be patient with each other. There isn't a magic bullet. And we're not going to have people roaming the campus telling people that they've got to wear their mask, that we just are not going to be able to do that.

And I think even at this point, it's not appropriate to be doing that. But I do think the gentle reminders, masks are very, very available on campus. And we can help people remember that. But that's really the best I can say. Maybe others have got other tips.

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** Yeah, I'll just say, I've said in the past, Martha and I have both reminded people when we've seen them to either raise their mask because it's down below their nose, or wear their mask if it's not on. I think as Gary says, it's appropriate to do that in the right way. It is our policy.

But as he says also, we have very good compliance. We understand it's not 100%. We're not doing the mask police thing as well. And I think gentle reminders are the appropriate level of interaction with others that are not obeying that policy or complying with it.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

Moving on to something that's a bit related. Just looking for some clarification for the guidelines around food at events or meetings at this point in time. And then sort of a follow-up to that is the food protocol for graduation and what that process would be. So if someone could speak to events and numbers and food, that would be-- that's a common theme as well.

**GARY  
KORETZKY:**

So maybe I can start for things that are happening now in our academic life and in our social life. And graduation still seems a little far away, but I'll let Mary talk a little bit about that. So again, all of this as Mike has said, and as Peter has said, is based on our thinking about where the risk profiles are and what can be done safely.

And remember, so many of members of our community are vaccinated and boosted, which is an incredible gift for us in many ways that people have been so helpful with that so that we can actually do things that we wouldn't be able to do if that wasn't the case. Because as we've said, the pandemic is still here, but vaccination and boosting is so key.

So at this point, the dining halls are open and the students are eating in the dining halls, that there are events on campus and food is allowed at events on campus. But we do ask people to be mindful about that. And mindful in a way that Mary really alluded to.

Because we've got different levels of comfort that our community members have. And somebody might want to go to an event but not be around everybody else who's eating. So the idea would be if there's food in an event to have it in a section, in a place, on the side of the room.

Still emphasize things that you can pick up, the grab and go rather than a big bowl of stuff that everybody is taking food from. And to have people really eating in that area, but there are other areas where people feel more comfortable not being unmasked and eating and not having colleagues like that, to just be mindful of that.

So we're moving into a situation where that is becoming possible. It is possible. And we just want people to be mindful of their colleagues and think about it. There's not going to be a specific regulation about this. It's really allowing now for us to be gradually opening up and doing the things that we really want to be able to do academically, but also remembering that we're in the setting still where there is viral transmission.

So let's just be more cautious. I hope that is something that everybody will feel comfortable with and that people can make their own choices and still be able to attend the events. It's just like you still will be able to wear a mask even when mask guidance is more relaxed. There will be opportunities for people to feel comfortable in all of our settings.

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:**

So let me tell you what our current thinking is around commencement. Because I learned this lesson in 2021 when our goal was to have an in-person commencement, and the state came out with a set of guidelines that we then very diligently tried to follow.

And then two weeks later, the guidelines changed. So then we shifted to try to follow them, and two weeks after that, the guidelines changed again. And that's not the state being arbitrary. The circumstances in the country kept shifting.

So right now we are planning an event that looks much closer to normal, two events, and then the college events are being feathered back in. I do know that for the event planners the question about food is presenting itself.

And all I can tell you is right now, do the best you can with the guidance that we've given you recognizing that we really won't know until we reach May what the circumstances are. And one of the silver linings I think for all of us has been that we've now realized how agile we can be when we need to be agile. Because we've done it now for two years.

So make your best plans with what we hope will be the case. And when you work with your vendors, recognize that if circumstances shift, I think our vendors have become much more agile as well. And I wish I could give you something more than that. But to do so would just be a fool's errand on my part. Because we can't know yet, but we have optimism about May.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

Good. Thank you. Moving on to another question. I'm going to send this to Gary. There are many Cornell programs and events that serve populations outside the mainstream university community, particularly off campus, often rural audiences throughout New York state.

Can there be exemptions to policies developed with on campus communities in mind so programs can continue their work throughout New York off campus? For instance, many communities will not attend extension classes if they're required to provide proof of vaccination.

**GARY  
KORETZKY:**

Yeah, so this becomes obviously a very, very complicated question, that we have the ability the authority to really control things that happen on campus. Out in the community, we do not have that. There was a question about, why do we have to wear masks on TCAT? Well, that's not a Cornell decision. That that's a TCAT decision.

And so we are doing more and more events off campus like we used to do, so that they're opening up all around. And if there's really a Cornell sponsored event where we're really responsible for that event in toto, right now the guidance that we're putting forward is guidance as though it were on campus.

It's my prediction that we're going to be relaxing that over time, that if you're in a community and the community has an event and there's certainly a Cornell speaker, that Cornell speaker can still go to that event if they want to and present at that event, that we don't have restrictions around events like that. If it's really a Cornell sponsored event, that's this gray area. And I think we're moving forward.

And again, I'll just point out that when a lot of this was done and when we were really thinking about this, not just a few weeks ago, there were 850,000 cases of COVID a day in the country. I think yesterday there were 120,000 recorded cases. It's changing dramatically. And as that changes dramatically, we're going to be able to change the guidance as well.

So I think that-- I really, really think that looking forward in the next few weeks, many of these requirements will be that are very nuanced. They'll come, the questions will come to us, we'll think about them carefully. And I think that people can look forward to many, many more things that they are used to doing from the past that they'll be able to do again.

So this is evolving. It's moving forward. And this is of course predicated on the hope that there isn't another COVID variant that just changes the landscape. But I think we're moving in the right direction for all of these issues.

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** I'll just add that for the specifics of the question, many of the program leaders for extension programs and other areas have reached out and asked for guidance and gotten guidance about how to continue those programs. Varies a little bit, as Gary says, for different programs.

But we are in a position where we're not stopping our outreach or canceling these programs. They're going forward, some in ways that are appropriate for the setting. They're not as stringent as on campus, where there's not a risk for on campus transmission, that sort of thing.

So I just want to make it clear that we are continuing to provide guidance, largely Gary's team, to provide guidance for how to do those things safely.

**ANDREA HAENLIN-MOTT:** Great. A follow-up question is, not sure who wants to take this particular one. But in 2020, retirement or salaries were cut to help mitigate the financial impact of COVID. Although the university didn't see the level of impact that was forecast and was able to give that payment back to those impacted.

So this is a question and it's been stated that there would be an assessment as to whether or not SIPs would be increased this year. Because of the great resignation, or is it being referred to, as there any thought to increasing the SIP amount greater than the typical 2% to 3%?

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** Maybe I'll take that one. Maybe Mary wants to weigh in after. But we are now close to finalizing our SIP pool and announcing our SIP pool. It is impacted by a number of variables, some of which are in this question. We've seen inflation rise.

You may know that we have a kind of rigorous way to evaluate both our SIP and our tuition increases. And those two things are tied together. So we try and look at what's the appropriate thing that increases university costs, and then cover those costs through our main revenue stream, which is tuition.

So these are not arbitrary. They're linked in a way. This year, the SIP increase will be reflective of the increase in our what's called ECI, the employment cost index, which has increased. It is a little bit backward looking. It hasn't increased quite as much as some of the predictions for inflation coming forward.

But it will influence our SIP pool and result in both a higher SIP increase than the previous years and a higher tuition increase than in previous years. That's about as much as I can say at this point about that.

What I would add is that is a SIP pool. And we have other ways of making sure that we're competitive on a national basis or an appropriate basis. Mary's unit does a great job in comparing salaries in certain areas so that we make sure that we're competitive. And we will continue to do that and continue to differentiate the salary pool based on the evaluation and excellence of workers. So I don't know if you want to add to that, Mary.

**MARY OPPERMAN:** No I think though, to just acknowledge the reality, that there's a lot right now around the-- the inflation went up fast. And so there's, I think, an understandable concern about its impact. And it is a factor. It absolutely is, and we're trying to understand it.

We don't know how long the inflation will stay at the rate that it's at. But it is a factor. And as Mike said, as a non-profit institution, we're also balancing the revenue that comes in with the expenditures. And our amazing faculty and staff really represent our largest expenditure.

So this is always a bit of a struggle. And I appreciate, because I'm hearing a lot about this, the concerns about whether our increases will keep up with inflation. And I hear that. I do just want to remind ourselves that we had years before the pandemic where inflation was at or near zero.

The University made the decision to give an increase, while modest, an increase, even though the exact correlation to inflation wasn't there. So we always use it as a factor, but it's never the only factor.

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** I don't know if you want to use this as an opportunity to point out our recent ranking as an employer, Mary. Kudos to you.

**MARY OPPERMAN:** Thank you. It's actually kudos to all of you. So Forbes does a survey of employees across the country for all the large employers. And we made it in-- and they list the top 500. And we made it into the first quartile of that. And it's thanks to the feedback that those of you who were asked responded.

And it's a time to remember that as a community, sometimes things aren't perfect but they're still good. And so thank you to all of you.

**ANDREA HAENLIN-MOTT:** Perfectly stated. Not perfect, but still good. We have folks talk about many questions that have come up about February break and spring break?

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** Yeah, let me just start and then I'll turn to Gary for a details. But one of the general principles that we used here for the start of this semester was people leave, they're exposed, we try and catch them on the way in as quickly as possible, limit transmission as much as possible.

And we will continue to do that for February and for March. We'll deploy much of this strategy that we used. We've been able to get, I understand this week, a new supply of 50,000 new antigen tests. So Gary's team has worked forward a plan to try and use those in this setting to try and quickly find out and provide the ability of individuals who have traveled to come back to find out whether they're positive or not. Gary, do you want to add to that?

**GARY KORETZKY:** Sure. I can just amplify that. But the basic is exactly what Mike said. So we know that there will be things that will happen over February break. One will be that students will travel, staff will travel, faculty will travel. And we even know that, we suspect, that students who are staying locally might do more gathering over a four day break when they don't have classes.

So what we have acquired, as Mike said, is 50,000 additional antigen tests. And we're going to be making them available in the following way. So that the recommendation will be for anybody who's traveled, any employee who has traveled, before they come back to campus and go back to their duties on campus, they will be able, if they would like, if they have the time, to come and do one of our supplemental tests.

We've had that all along and that's not going away. And you could get a PCR test. And if you're come back-- if you're away, you come back on Sunday, but you're not coming back to work until Wednesday, then you can do your test on Monday and you'll get the result on Tuesday before you go back on Wednesday.

It will be the same PCR test that we've had available for everybody. If you come back on Sunday and you can't, and you need to be back at work on Monday, you can get PCR test Monday morning and be really careful during the day, just like we've always done.

The other thing that we're going to provide though are antigen tests for people that want them. And so all of the students will be expected because, especially those that live on campus and dorms, when they come back to pick up an antigen test and do it right away. And the right way is really important because the antigen test is fast. And you get the result very, very quickly.

And so we want to make sure that if a student traveled then came back, and before they start interacting with others in the dorm that they do antigen testing. And if they're positive, then they isolate themselves. They're negative, then they can continue to go on with their regular routine.

So all students will be expected to do antigen testing, or if they have time, PCR testing before coming back to class on Wednesday morning. And like I said, it's going to be available widely for staff. You'll be able to pick up an antigen test as well, also be able to use a PCR testing, depending upon your particular circumstances. If you have antigen tests at home, because they're now available, please use them before you come back to work, knowing that people have really done other things over this February break and it would be nice to make sure, for your own peace of mind, that you're still testing negative.

We will likely do something very similar after spring break. We're practicing with February break. We've got everything in place. And I'm sure we will tweak it as we watch what the results are and the ease at which we make it possible for people to be tested. The bottom line is that we want to make this available to everybody, easy. And we believe that if people take part in this that everybody will be safer.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

Great. I think as a follow-up to that, there's a lot of questions that are talking about clarification of the testing protocols, just in general. If you could just clarify that for folks because again-- answer the question related to testing protocols but then also there's some follow-up questions related to that with the vaccine shot/booster mandates for fully remote employees. But if you could answer the first process, that would be great.

**GARY  
KORETZKY:**

Sure. I can describe what our testing program will be like on Monday. What it's like today is that undergraduates, and law students, MBA students, some others are getting tested once a week. And that there are about 1,600 staff that are being tested once a week. These are our student facing staff.

And that individuals who are not vaccinated or eligible but not boosted are getting tested twice a week. We also have supplementary testing available. You can opt into testing if you'd like. And we've got symptomatic testing. The supplemental opt-in and symptomatic testing will not change.

So anybody who is not required to test but wants to, be reminded they can opt-in. Anybody who's traveled, they come back, they need to get tested. We have that available through supplemental testing. And if you're not feeling well, that there's a drive-up and a walk-up location on campus where you can get symptomatic testing.

Starting next week, those employees who are fully vaccinated and boosted will no longer be asked to be tested on a weekly basis, as will our undergraduates, law students, vet students, MBA students, the students that were in the weekly required testing will no longer be in that testing program starting on Monday.

However, we still, like I said, will make testing available. And we want people to avail themselves of that testing. We feel comfortable that we're able to do this. I'll just tell you employee case counts have come down really, really dramatically, that there are days now where there zero or very few numbers of employees that report positive tests. So we feel very comfortable with this change.

**MIKE KOTLIKOFF:** Maybe I'll just add a little bit of the why to what Gary just said. Our strategy has really been to test those individuals that are most at risk, either for contracting SARS-CoV-1-- CoV-2 or transmitting it to others. And that led us initially to do testing of everybody that was always symptomatic.

Testing was very, very effective in terms of keeping transmission down while people were vulnerable and largely unvaccinated. As we have a vaccinated community, we've shifted more towards supplemental testing, when people feel like they may have been exposed or they're symptomatic, as well as symptomatic testing for those people that have symptoms and want to find out, is it a cold, is it something else, or am I positive for COVID.

So in that evolution, we're now this, as Gary just described, one more step where we tested more intensively when people came back and we expected the incidence to be highest on campus. We now feel that we can move towards something that really focuses on people that have symptoms largely and on those people in our community that have exemptions from the vaccination and booster mandates.

So that's the next step and trying to basically test those populations that are most likely to be at the core of spread on campus. We'll continue to evaluate this. We'll continue to evaluate prevalence, which we'll get a sense from our symptomatic numbers on campus, and continue to evolve this as necessary.

**MARY OPPERMAN:** Let me just add just a couple of things here. I think you mentioned, Andrea, the question about fully remote workers. So I get a lot of questions from the fully remote workers about why we're mandating the vaccine and booster.

And the answer is quite simple. There is really no way for us to know with certainty whether or not somebody who has a primarily remote job will be on campus. And therefore, the mandates are consistent across all of the communities because the goal of the mandates is to prevent spread on campus.

For those in who are remote, so they are not regularly coming to campus, they are not in the testing protocol because they're not here to be tested. But I am very pleased to say that as of this week, our booster mandate, so booster exemption mandate, we are now at nearly 94% compliance.

So we are really proud of the community for taking that extra step and getting that booster. We know it's made a difference. And the campus-- I'm sorry, I'm just giving you the 94% is the staff and faculty. We're doing really well.

**ANDREA HAENLIN-MOTT:** Mary, there's a follow-up question that really falls to you. It's trying to understand for staff who have long-term effects of COVID, job security is of concern. And what approach the university has with those particular situations.

**MARY OPPERMAN:** Yeah, so I think this is-- I'm glad someone asked this question. Because I think when we moved to Omicron, the general national press was that it was much less serious. And that's true. For the vast majority of people, if they have any symptoms at all, they're sort of cold-like or maybe flu-like.

But we do have a small population right from the start and continuing to this day that have long haul COVID symptoms. And their circumstances will be treated like all other long-term chronic illnesses.

So they should be reaching out to medical leaves to discuss what their options are in terms of if they need a short-term disability. Hopefully they won't need it, but if necessary, long-term disability. And all of the job protections that are associated with any medically related need to be away follow them as well. I'm glad someone asked that question.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

Good. This is a follow-up question that says, I've looked at the modeling team's modeling of interventions. The model focused exclusively on relative efficacy for viral transmission. But I don't see any similar modeling for potential harms of intervention such as social emotional well-being, academic performance, et cetera. Peter, could you speak to this?

**PETER  
FRAZIER:**

Sure, I'd be glad to. We actually spend an enormous amount of time thinking about how to balance using interventions in order to reduce viral transmission on campus so that we can protect people's health, we can avoid hospitalizations, we can avoid people getting long COVID.

We try to balance that on the one hand against the negative effects of all the interventions that we have to put in place. When we build models, we spend a lot of time focusing on viral transmission because those are the things - that's the aspect of COVID that's where I think modeling really provides a lot of value above and beyond what you would be able to understand about that trade-off just thinking about it as a person.

And then we present those numbers to leadership and try to contextualize them by saying things like, hey, if you put this intervention in place, this is an intervention that will have some negative effects but really will protect people a lot. Here's another intervention that will protect people less so.

So we present those as trade-offs and then the leaders that are on this call think about balancing that against these other effects. And so I rely a lot on Mary to represent employees. Ryan Lombardi does a great job of thinking about the effect of interventions on students. And so it's part of a comprehensive thinking.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

This is a question there may not be an answer for, but I think it's something that's on the minds of a number of people. The kids want to know, will there be a Slope Day or Dragon Day this year? Any thoughts on that?

**MIKE  
KOTLIKOFF:**

I know we are talking about a Slope Day now. I haven't heard discussion of Dragon Day. We are talking about a somewhat modified Slope Day now. My guess is we would have a Dragon Day as well. But I really can't speak to that. I don't know, Mary, if you've heard anything about that.

But I will say, generally, we're shifting a lot of our activities appropriately to the conditions here. I go to the basketball games and we're no longer checking for vaccination at the basketball games. You wear a mask and have a ticket, and that's enough to get you in. And so you'll see more of those kinds of modifications as we go forward.

**ANDREA  
HAENLIN-  
MOTT:**

And a follow-up to that Mary, is what about an Employee Day? A lot of feedback that they loved the Summer Employee Celebration Street Fair last year. Any thought about that?

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:** Yeah, so thank you for asking that question. So one of the things we learned when we tried to pivot the Fall Employee Day was it really didn't work, that what people really got was the most from was the gathering, the ability to enjoy a game together and eat a meal together.

Until we can get back to doing that, the winter celebration, we've really changed the winter celebration to a recognition and an acknowledgment of those who have gone above and beyond during this period of time. So you'll begin to see just a small way that we're trying to say thank you through this month and next month to the many, many people who have been just doubling down throughout this entire pandemic.

Everyone loves the Street Fair. Absolutely everyone loves the Street Fair including me. So if there is one at the end of the summer, invite me back and I'll come. I think everybody felt so good about that. And I'm so grateful that we were able to have it before the case counts started going up.

But failing another street fair, the people that are here in the fall, won't be me, hopefully the circumstances will be such that we can get back to that wonderful gathering where people share a meal together and enjoy the company of one another and go cheer on our teams.

**JESSICA  
WITHERS:** Thanks, Mary. We only have a couple of minutes left. I want to say thank you to staff for bringing their questions today and asking them. And thank you to the panelists. But before we wrap up, Mary, do you want to close us out?

**MARY  
OPPERMAN:** Yeah, maybe I will, and then maybe Mike might like to say something before we go. I think I'll end where we started, which is at a thank you to all of you. I thought that the question to Peter about the long-term impacts of interventions on things like social well-being was a really, really important question.

And I guess I would elevate that question to say that's a maybe global, but certainly national, question that we're all going to work through together. And it's hard to know today what the long-term impacts of two years of pandemic will be on our families, our children, our social circles, our ability to communicate with one another in person again.

And some of how we emerge is up to each of us in how we re-present ourselves into a post-pandemic world and how we model that for our children and others. So the future I think is ripe with opportunities, an opportunity for us to think about ourselves and our communities in the most inclusive and kind way, to move forward together with a focus on everything that we have to be grateful for.

And so I know that it's hard after two years of the unknown. But I see a bright future for Cornell. I'm totally biased after 25 years, but this is an incredible, incredible environment. And I just want to thank you all. Mike?

**MIKE  
KOTLIKOFF:** That's terrific comments, Mary. You do that much better than I can. But let me just add that in that spirit, we hear from these questions and from these communications concerns on both sides of these issues. Some people feel we're being far too restrictive, some people feel we're not being restrictive enough.

Everybody on this call, all the panelists have heard this repeatedly from both sides. We are a community. We're trying to respect everyone's opinion here. We're also trying to follow the science. And I'll end where I started. We're going to continue to make these decisions based on the best available information. We're going to try and give people the space that they need to continue to do their jobs in an excellent fashion and enjoy working at Cornell.

And part of that is going to involve some decisions that people disagree with. I hope, as Mary says, we can be a community and can continue to pull together to do the excellent job that we have done at Cornell and will continue to do.

So thank you very much for doing that. I know there are so many of you on this call for whom we really depend to continue to deliver the education, research, and outreach that we do. And I want to thank you again for doing that under these extraordinary circumstances.

**JESSICA  
WITHERS:**

Thank you, Mike. Thank you, Mary. That concludes our event. Thank you, everyone. Take care.