

VCIH COVID Protocols Information Sheet for 2026

What follows is a distillation of our approach to community safety during the pandemic, based on extensive research, logistical realities, available resources, and the input and experience of faculty, staff and students.

Read on after the summary to learn more about the values, research data and specific material circumstances that inform our decision-making processes and final policies.

All VCIH students are responsible for understanding and abiding by the information found in the summary, immediately below. Your acceptance of a spot in the program serves as confirmation that you are aware of and agree to abide by these practices when/if you attend in-person events on campus.

Summary of VCIH's policies and practices:

- As an organization dedicated to collective wellbeing, VCIH has been highly cautious in our approach to the pandemic. **We will not hold in-person classes that present unnecessary risk to students, faculty or staff.**
- **Students should plan to be flexible in their expectations** for VCIH to offer in-person intensives, recognizing that we will do our best to communicate conditions and changes as quickly and with as much transparency as possible, given the unpredictability and complexity of the ongoing pandemic.
- Based on public health conditions at a given time, **we may require distancing and/or masks both indoors and out, depending on each cohort's size.** Teachers may teach without masks at times, to improve audibility.
- **During the summer in-person intensives, we'll rely heavily on outside classroom use (large event tent) and minimize use of the indoor classrooms.** Inside VCIH's building, we have four HEPA-13 air filters (these capture down to 0.1 micron, which includes coronaviruses--these are used in hospitals and similar settings and filter all of the air in the space every 30 minutes). We also have four air circulators in the building, along with windows and doors open as long as the weather is fair. **We researched best practices and equipment for our setting and believe these provide a high degree of air quality and safety.**

During inclement weather, we may also use other spaces on the campus where we lease space. These buildings are not always ventilated to the same degree (though many are). However, we bring our portable HEPA-13 filters to the spaces we use to improve air quality.

What does all of this look like in practice? While we reserve the right to revise our approach, for those curious about how our policies were applied as of 2024, all outdoor classes were held without masks (while offering designated masking areas, as needed), while masks were required indoors at all times. Approximately 2 out of 6 days of each intensive were offered indoors due to inclement weather or a need for classroom technology.

- **We encourage students to be vaccinated and up to date on boosters, if possible.**

For anyone still seeking information about safety and efficacy of vaccination, we gathered a fair amount of research early in the pandemic which we'd be happy to share.

- We reserve the right to collect vaccination data and periodically share updated, anonymized information with each cohort so that everyone can make informed decisions about attendance. We have not exercised this right since 2022.
- **Regardless of vaccination, all students and faculty will be required to have a pair of negative antigen tests (aka home rapid tests) before attending intensives.**
- We ask everyone to be mindful that their personal choices impact all of us at VCIH and **ask all to agree to caring for and being responsible to each other through our behavior outside of VCIH, as well as at school.**

The details behind our policies and practices:

We encourage you to read the first section below which lays out the values and priorities that underpin our approach. Further on, if you're interested, you'll find details about the conditions, requirements and responsibilities that VCIH directors and faculty have taken into account as we've considered how to safely hold in-person (especially indoor) classes. You can choose to

skim this information, but should you have questions, we encourage you to read this section first to see if we've covered the information here. We encourage you to follow the links provided for further information, as well.

Feel free to reach out with any unanswered questions you have.

Our values, as they relate to the pandemic:

We value public health, broadly, and the wellbeing of our local community specifically:

- **It's important to us to keep faculty, staff, students, clients, and the Central Vermont community as healthy as possible.**
- **We believe in a diversity of tactics** to do so, including behavioral change (**limiting activities that increase risk of exposure, masks, distancing, handwashing, ventilation, air filtration, sanitizing surfaces**), **use of herbs/food/supplements/rest for individual health, and vaccination** for those with a reasonable expectation of safety given the data available (acknowledging that some have health conditions that may prevent safe vaccination and some have other individual reasons to choose not to vaccinate).
- We recognize that in Vermont and nationwide, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) individuals experience disproportionately higher rates of COVID and related negative outcomes; similarly, chronically ill and disabled folks are often at higher risk, as are elders; **our commitment to health justice means we prioritize protecting marginalized members of our community who are at higher risk of harm due to systemically driven health disparities.**
- Of less importance than human lives, but still relevant to organizational wellbeing: **we want to be responsible local representatives of the herbal and broader integrative health fields**, avoiding anti-science narratives or actions that could bring negative attention to VCIH or herbal medicine generally (e.g. creating conditions for widespread infection in our student body).

We value individual bodily autonomy:

- Some folks have conditions which mean they aren't yet good candidates for vaccination or may never be, while others have conditions which reduce the effectiveness of vaccines when administered; **VCIH doesn't wish to limit access for students in any of these circumstances.**

- **Some folks have valid concerns and critiques about the risks** of vaccination generally, about mRNA vaccines in particular, and/or about the medical and pharmaceutical industries' trustworthiness; **some of these concerns are rooted in historical and ongoing harm** at the hands of the medical system (e.g. current disproportionately high rates of birth-related mortality for Black people; high prevalence of abuse of trans and non-binary individuals seeking medical care; historical medical experimentation on enslaved Black people; and eugenics campaigns carried out against Indigenous and disabled people).
- **VCIH does not wish to parse the reasons for student choices not to vaccinate** or become an arbiter of what folks "should" think or do with their bodies and health.
- **VCIH does want to recognize people's concerns and fears** and offer education to alleviate those where possible, **while not coercing students to vaccinate in order to access our programs.**

Student experience:

- many students deeply value gathering with peers and teachers
- some students have health concerns or live with high risk individuals which makes in-person study inaccessible
- in addition to health concerns, many students benefit from being able to attend classes from home due to commitments to family and/or work, as well as inability to commute or move to VT

Faculty and staff experience:

- faculty and staff need to feel comfortable and reasonably safe to do their job well
- faculty deeply value gathering with peers and students
- some faculty have health concerns or live with high risk individuals
- some faculty prefer teaching online and/or working from home (or at least the benefits it affords)
- some faculty prefer teaching in the classroom and/or need to work from VCIH for tech reasons

VCIH schedule and space logistics:

- **We have a large event tent for outdoor classes** for use by Roots apprenticeship students and intensive classes for all cohorts. We use larger, indoor spaces located on the campus where we lease space, as needed.
- **We have a hybrid classroom set up via Zoom for Education**, which uses responsive (vs. static) filming and tech support in the classroom (indoor and outdoor) to include real-time participation of distance students.
- **We have HEPA-13 air filters and multiple space and window fans** in place in the building to maintain good airflow and filtration, in accordance with current best practices used in businesses and schools.

Federal and State public health guidelines/rules:

- **The State of Vermont has lifted all COVID-19-related limitations** on travel, gathering and workplace activities and there is currently no mask mandate.
- General public health consensus (e.g. CDC, NIAID, [VT Dept of Health](#)) suggests that **even with vaccination, masking and ventilation indoors is important, especially if not everyone is vaccinated** (in the group, as well as in the community at large).
- **Travel (especially by plane) should still be undertaken with caution, in general**; masks are still recommended.
- **Travel to and from Vermont from other states is currently unrestricted and the international border with Canada is open** (vaccination and testing may still be monitored at the border and students are encouraged to confirm conditions of entry).
- Most of the above guidelines are loose/changing/sometimes contradictory. **Researchers at MIT came up with this [calculator](#) which we've used in the past to gather info about the likely safety of spending time together** in our specific building, with the ventilation and filtration we have in place, with the particular behaviors (speaking, masked) and vaccination data of each group. These calculations will continue to inform our decision making. The take-away from use of this calculator is that **ventilation and vaccination are most important, with masking and type of mask also making a significant impact** (and the researchers [contend](#) that distancing indoors is irrelevant and ineffective, as the virus is airborne).