

Updated Pandemic Guidance for Veterinarians January 10, 2021

Current Situation

The number of Georgia residents testing positive for SARS-CoV-2 and the test positivity rates continue to increase across Georgia. This intensification of community spread increases the risk for workplace acquired infections and workplace outbreaks in the veterinary setting. In addition, the SARS-CoV-2 Variant B.1.1.7, first identified in the U.K., has been identified in Georgia. This variant is believed to be 50-70% more transmissible than wild-type virus strains¹. Currently recommended measures to reduce transmission (masks, physical distancing, hand hygiene, surface sanitation, avoiding crowds/closed spaces) remain effective in reducing transmission of this variant when employed consistently.

More on the SARS-CoV-2 Variant B.1.1.7

According to Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove (Technical Lead for Covid-19 WHO Health Emergencies Programme) speaking at the January 8 WHO press briefing, the SARS-CoV-2 Variant B.1.1.7 has an R of 1.5 to 1.7 compared to 1.1 for wild-type SARS-CoV-2. Early reports have shown that individuals infected with this variant have higher viral loads than would be typical of wild-type SARS-CoV-2 suggesting that this may underly the increase in transmissibility. This variant has demonstrated equal transmissibility across all age groups but, to date, there is no evidence that infection with Variant B.1.1.7 alters presentation or disease severity for any group. However, increased transmissibility has resulted in this variant being the predominant cause of COVID-19 in the U.K. and the associated escalation of case numbers has resulted in increased hospitalizations and death.

Additional information on B.1.1.7 is available at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). Recordings of weekly WHO Press Briefings are available at [WHO.int](https://www.who.int).

Practical Considerations around Variant B.1.1.7 in Veterinary Workplaces

Reassessment of workplace safety measures to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace in the context of this significantly more contagious variant is highly recommended. Specifically:

- Universal wearing of medical masks or two-layer cloth masks (preferably with an inner filter) at all times in the workplace should be reinforced. For more information on masks, visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
- Utilization of eye protection (face shields, goggles, eye glasses) should be considered.
- Strict adherence to hand hygiene and surface sanitation protocols should be reinforced.
- Particular attention to the risk of transmission should be paid to “break” areas where food is consumed and masks cannot be worn.

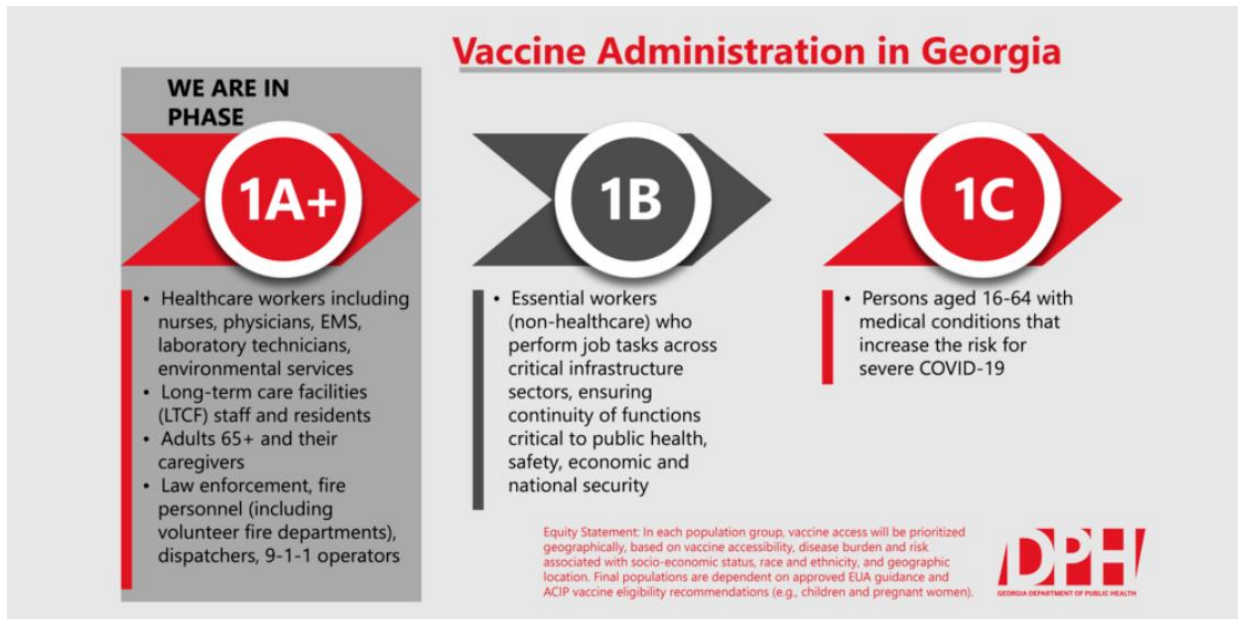
Recommendations for improving the safety of break areas:

- Improve ventilation by opening windows if possible.
- Install [portable air filters](#).
- Support physical distancing by distancing furniture or utilizing floor markers.
- Encourage employees to eat in an outdoor area when possible/available.
- Encourage employees to limit their time in break areas to the time needed to eat and to not engage in conversation while eating.

It remains critical to elicit buy-in from all employees regarding the essential role they play in workplace safety by adhering to workplace safety measures, not coming to work if they feel ill, have tested positive, or have been exposed, and minimizing their risk for exposure outside of work. No single measure is effective on its own and no measure is unimportant. Keeping everyone safe in the workplace requires a comprehensive approach and the participation of everyone who enters the workplace including non-employees (clients, delivery people, visitors). Rationale, Evidence and Suggestions for Implementation available here: <https://gvma.net/covid-19-resources/caring-for-yourself-staff/>

COVID-19 Vaccination in Georgia

Georgia is currently in Phase 1A+ of vaccine administration in Georgia. Vaccine availability remains limited. As of Monday, the vaccine is being made available in Georgia to anyone in group 1A+. More information on vaccination availability and vaccine sites can be found at [DPH.Georgia.gov](https://www.dph.georgia.gov) and on individual county DPH websites.



Current Guidance on Employees Testing Positive in the Workplace

Definition of Contact: Per [CDC guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s1119-covid-19-contact.html), close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more within in a 24 hour period. In health care settings, this does not apply to situations where both individuals are wearing appropriate PPE.

Notification of Contacts: Per [CDC Guidelines for Veterinary Clinics](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s1119-covid-19-contact.html), inform team members, clients and others in the workplace if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or is believed to have COVID-19 so that they can take the measures they need to take to protect their personal health and the health of their family members.

Return to work: According to the [CDC guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s1119-covid-19-contact.html), individuals who test positive for SARS-CoV-2 but do not have symptoms can return to work 10 days after a positive test. Individuals with symptoms can return to work after at least 10 days have passed since symptoms began AND at least 24 hours with no fever without fever reducing medication AND other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

¹ <https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/21/looming-questions-new-variant-coronavirus/>