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# Feasibility of Enhancing COVID Protection

# for

**On-campus Dining at UBC**

for Celene Fung

Senior Policy Planner

UBC Community Planning and Programming

&

Gabriella Scali

Community Programs and Outreach Manager

UBC Community Planning and Programming

By

Han Li

ENGL 301 Student

University of British Columbia

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# INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2019, Wuhan first reported viral pneumonia, later officially identified as the novel SARS-CoV-2 virus, also known as COVID-19. As of March 15, 2022, the international pandemic has infected more than 458 million people and caused more than 6 million deaths (WHO). The sudden outbreak caught countries off guard, and people's studies, work, and lives came to a standstill. It also posed an unprecedented challenge for universities. University campuses are buzzing cultural hubs where students from all over the world study and live close to each other. However, the rapid spread of the coronavirus impacted the foundations of this unique ecosystem.

In response to the outbreak of the coronavirus, UBC transited to online learning. Fortunately, as vaccination rates rise, UBC resumes back to campus again. However, coronavirus is challenging to end soon, with the BC Centre for Disease Control and Prevention reporting 236 confirmed new cases in a single day yesterday. UBC students participate in various campus activities, including lectures, club activities and daily activities. Therefore, there is a high probability of rapid transmission if someone is tested positive. Hence, it is vital to enhance COVID-19 protection on campus.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, UBC has implemented several measures, including masks compulsory during indoor activities and regular seating for each class during the semester. However, on-campus dining has many risks, especially indoors. Coronavirus spreads mainlythrough two aspects. One is through respiratory droplets from an infected person; the other is by touching something with the virus, then touching the mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands. Besides, certain environmental conditions facilitate the transmission, such as re-circulated air (Government of Canada). Therefore, many students gather in confined spaces during mealtimes without wearing masks for a long time, putting students at high risk of getting coronavirus. There are two main reasons: First, students remove their masks to eat and talk in confined spaces where they cannot keep their distance. Second, students must wait in line for long periods to order or heat their meals due to the similarity of mealtimes.

Based on a review of crucial research as well as surveys with UBC students, this report is to (a) determine the extent of student satisfaction with on-campus dining, (b) confirm the feasibility of having acrylic transparent anti-droplet isolation boards in confined dining areas and (c) provide practical recommendations on enhancing student safety for on-campus dining.

This report covers five major topics: what are UBC’s current on-campus indoor dining areas and how is the environment, what action does UBC take presently sticking to students’ on-campus dining, what are UBC students’ attitudes towards current indoor dining environment, how many students agree to have isolation boards and what actions are being taken worldwide to mitigate risk.

The report concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the survey samples, the adjustments of BC’s current policy on coronavirus and by recommending practical suggestions for our campus.

# DATA AND ANALYSIS

# *On-campus Indoors Dining Areas*

# UBC offers a variety of dining options for students, including restaurants, quick service, cafes, dining halls, and bring meals. Excluding the above options with their own separate dining spaces, AMS Student Nest and UBC Life Building are the two most popular indoor dining areas among students. They are student-centered activity hubs that house cafes, restaurants, tables, and quiet study spaces. Here are two pictures of Life and Nest taken around 15:00 on weekdays.

# *A picture containing text, chair, area Description automatically generated*

# Figure 1: Weekdays 15:00 at Nest

# A group of people in a room Description automatically generated with low confidence

# Figure 2: Weekdays 15:00 at Life Building

# Even if it is not the peak mealtime, many students eat and chat with their friends without keeping distance. This kind of dining environment increases the risk of coronavirus transmission.

# *Current COVID-19 Protocols*

# The table below summarizes the protocols of UBC food services:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What UBC is Doing | What Students can do |
| 1.Masks are mandatory except when sitting at tables and eating or drinking. | 1. Wash hands frequently for 20-30 seconds using soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer |
| 2.All guests are required to sanitize when entering the dining hall. | 2. Abstain from touching eyes, nose, and/or mouth, especially with unwashed hands |
| 3.Increased frequency of cleaning in high-touch areas. | 3. Sneeze or cough by covering mouth and nose with the crease of elbow, then wash hands |
| 4.Hand sanitizer stations are available in all major locations. | 4. Don’t come to dining hall when you are uncomfortable. Contact the housing front desk for help. |
| 5.Staff are reminded to wash hands frequently with proper hand-washing techniques. | 5. Bigger spaces, fewer faces. Keep hang-outs small and give space to people outside your bubble. |
| 6.Staff are asked to stay home if they are ill or have flu symptoms. |

# Source: UBC Food Services

# UBC follows all requirements outlined by the Provincial Health Orders and Interior Health. However, both “What UBC is doing” and “What Students can do” are highly reliant on students’ self-consciousness and not detailed enough like “masks are mandatory except when sitting at tables and eating or drinking”. Nevertheless, it does not specify that students should put their masks on if they chat with their friends during eating or drinking. As mentioned before, droplets from an infected person are the primary means of transmission. Therefore, UBC should focus more on how to effectively prevent students from being exposed to each other’s droplets. Besides, some of them are hard to follow under the UBC context. For example, UBC suggests students keep social distance, it is impossible to guarantee effective social distancing as most students have similar mealtime.

# *Survey*

# Thirty-seven university students complete a short survey designed to understand students’ current dining habits, obtain opinions on UBC’s dining environment in pandemic and their attitude towards setting acrylic transparent anti-droplet isolation boards. The survey consists of eight multiple-choice questions and sends to volunteers to participate.

# There are thirty-two valid surveys. The first four questions of the survey are to collect frequency, location preferences, habits of students dining on-campus. Nearly 60% of them prefer to dine indoors with friends in common areas on campus, which is in line with previous expectations and demonstrates that UBC students are still at a relatively high risk of dining indoors on-campus. However, as the weather warms, some students may prefer to eat outside.

# Questions five to seven focus on students’ opinions towards the current indoor dining environment. It is worth noting that 75% of students believe that “Dining in UBC is sometimes unpleasant and/or uncomfortable”. More than half of the students think the dining space is adequate, but the waiting time is long.

# The last question collects students’ opinion towards having acrylic transparent anti-droplet isolation board in confined dining areas. 43.75% of students strongly agree with having baffles, 21.88% are ok with it, 15.63% of students choose neither agree nor disagree and 18.75% of them disagree. Therefore, most students are in favor of the installation of baffles.

## Other Universities

## COVID-19 is global, so it is necessary to understand and learn how the other world’s universities respond to on-campus dining during the pandemic.

## Virginia Commonwealth University, located in Richmond, Virginia (Elliott):

## All campus dining locations are cashless.

## No more buffets on campus

## Strict cleaning and sanitation procedures

## Expand ordering through its “Bite” app and implement “to-go” dining

## North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (Elliott):

## Use of personal protective equipment

## Timed sanitizing procedures

## Rearrange tables and seating to offer at least six feet of space between students

## University of Houston (Fischer):

## Robotic delivery fleets to let students get their food without having to step into crowded dining halls

![A picture containing building, outdoor, ground, orange

Description automatically generated]()

Figure 3: Robotic delivery fleetsat University of Houston

## Source: EAB

## Hokkaido University, Japan & Gyeongsang National University, Korea have acrylic transparent anti-droplet isolation boards in dining halls:

## A group of people sitting at desks in a room Description automatically generated with low confidenceA picture containing text, ceiling, indoor, shop Description automatically generated

Figure 4: Anti-droplet isolation boards

Source: RED

**CONCLUSION**

***Summary and Overall Interpretation of Findings***

Coronavirus has posed a significant challenge to daily life and work in the past few years and greatly affects UBC students’ campus life and studies. UBC students spend a significant amount of time on-campus, and many students gather, causing a high possibility of transmission.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, UBC is always in action. However, UBC has not paid enough attention to the indoor dining. Current protocols meet the standard of the official health departments without incorporating UBC’s situation. It is vital to have more detailed protocols to guarantee student safety. If coronavirus continues to spread on campus, it causes panic among students and affects UBC’s reputation.

Though the BC health departments believe the coronavirus is under control, it is not the time to relax. According to the survey, many UBC students think dining in UBC is not always comfortable and the waiting time is long.

Affected by the pandemic, world universities make changes on students’ on-campus dining.The main principle is to maintain social distance and reduce contact.

***Recommendations***

Although people under 25 years have the lowest risk of severe disease. However, students’ activities can be key to persistent ongoing community transmission. UBC community still can take some immediate and inexpensive steps to mitigate the risk. Please consider the following recommendations:

* Update UBC Vancouver COVID-19 food protocols.
* Courage students to dine outdoors.
* Unified entry and exit routes of popular dining areas.
* Consider a contactless operating system.
* Design UBC’s ordering app to avoid waiting time.
* Plan specific dining areas in AMS Nest and Life Building and set acrylic transparent anti-droplet isolation boards.

As a UBC student, I hope the COVID-19 will go away soon. Our campus gets better and safer.

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