STAY SAFE MN

Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Institutions of Higher Education

1 2 / 2 7 / 2 0 2 1

Updates for this guidance include: Modified reporting for institutions of higher education (page 2); Best practices and considerations section to incorporate resources for establishing vaccine levels on campus (page 3); resources for promoting vaccine (page 4); resources for communicating to students and employees on what to do if they test positive for COVID-19 (page 8); and refined messaging of key strategies to students and employees on campus (page 9).

This document provides considerations for use at institutions of higher education when developing plans for campus learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These considerations are flexible, allowing institutions to tailor actions that best suit the unique characteristics of the campus and their capacity for implementing mitigation actions.

In developing these considerations, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) reviewed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html), the American College Health Association (ACHA) guidance for COVID-19 at COVID-19 Resources (www.acha.org/ACHA/Resources/Topics/2019_Novel_Coronavirus_2019-nCoV.aspx), and recommendations from MDH higher education workgroups. These workgroups were composed of representatives from colleges and universities across Minnesota. The guidance presented here complements guidance provided for higher education by CDC.

Consistent with approaches outlined by CDC and ACHA, mitigation actions for higher education will depend heavily on vaccine coverage on campus. Institutions should determine ways to monitor vaccine coverage on campus and adjust mitigation measures accordingly.

Institutions should develop plans that outline communication strategies, mitigation actions, and other disease prevention activities that support a safe campus culture. Institutions should maintain resources that allow access to COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 vaccine, support vaccine promotion, and have protocols in place to ensure effective responses to cases, clusters, and surges.

For additional resources related to higher education institutions, refer to Institutes of Higher Education (IHE): COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html).

For additional information on the basics of COVID-19, visit Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html).

Reporting COVID-19

MDH requirements for reporting COVID-19

COVID-19 is a reportable disease in Minnesota. Institutions of higher education are required to report cases and deaths to MDH, per Minnesota Rules, part 4605.7070 (www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4605.7070/). Additionally, Healthcare Providers and Sites Performing Lab Tests are required to report per 4605.7050, Office of the Revisor of Statutes Minnesota Addministrative Rules (www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4605.7050/). For more information on the communicable disease rule, visit Minnesota Rules, chapter 4605 (www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4605/).

When to report: Institutions of higher education

Report to the MDH Institutions of Higher Education team when there are increasing cases on campus, including:

- When cases exceed one of the two thresholds defined below:
  - **The number of cases at the institution is** 3% or more of the total number of on-campus students (i.e., students who are routinely on campus) over a 14-day period, OR
  - **The average percent positivity of tests performed** by campus health services is 8% or more over a 14-day period
    - This 8% test positivity indicator is suggestive of high transmission rates on campus. The indicator is also consistent with CDC indicators, as a suggestion of when transmission rates are substantial or high. Refer to page 13 of HealthData.gov: COVID-19 Community Profile Report (healthdata.gov/Health/COVID-19-Community-Profile-Report/gqxm-d9w9).
  - Continue to report weekly until the indicator outlined above falls below the respective threshold level (for example, falls below the 3% over a 14-day period). After initially reporting through the MDH REDCap system, you will receive weekly reminders to update your institution's disease transmission status.
- When there is an unusual cluster, an increase in disease severity (such as an increase in hospitalizations, etc.), or when extra support is needed around testing, vaccination, or other mitigation measures.

How to report

- If any of the above criteria are met, report to MDH using the online COVID-19 College and University Case Reporting form (redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=KWF3TMAX7E).

- MDH may ask for further information on cases, as needed.

When to report: Health care providers and sites performing lab tests

Health care providers and sites performing lab tests should report as described in the following resources:

- Health care providers (including clinicians serving campus health services clinics), report **all** positive cases using the COVID-19 Provider Portal (redcap-c19.web.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=J3AH4M7W7D).

- Labs or other sites performing lab tests (including those performing rapid on-site testing), report **all** positive and negative results to: Uploading Lab Results to MDH RePortal (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/reportal.html).

For additional information on reporting COVID-19, visit Reporting COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 Infections (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/report.html).

Best practices and considerations

Implement campus operations that minimize transmission

Layered mitigation strategies are effective in preventing COVID-19 transmission. Campus operations for reducing transmission of COVID-19 should include overlapping strategies, including promoting vaccination, masking, testing, social distancing, and maintaining support for isolation and quarantine. The following are considerations for implementing these layered strategies. These layered strategies are meant to complement strategies outlined in CDC's CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html).

Use vaccination levels on campus to inform campus operations and mitigation strategies

- To the extent possible, assess vaccine coverage on campus and implement appropriate mitigation efforts as needed.

- IHEs have many different tools they can use to assess vaccine coverage and survey students or employees on campus, including the Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC). For more information on how to use MIIC, refer to Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/miic/index.html).

- CDC recommendations for mitigation measures depend on whether or not the institution has a fully vaccinated campus. For further guidance on determining if your campus is considered fully vaccinated, refer to CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html).

Continue to promote vaccine on campus

Vaccination against COVID-19 is an important tool for preventing transmission of COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines provide strong protection, especially against severe illness and death. More people vaccinated means less disease in our communities. Vaccination will also help prevent the spread of new COVID-19 variants. Visit COVID-19 Vaccine (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/index.html).

- Recommendations for who should get vaccinated and who should get boosters:
  - CDC recommends everyone ages 5 years and older receive a COVID-19 vaccine primary series as soon as possible.
  - CDC recommends everyone ages 16 years and older who is fully vaccinated against COVID-19 receive a booster shot. The timing of the booster shot depends on the vaccine received for the initial vaccine series.
  - For more information on COVID-19 vaccine recommendations, visit COVID-19 ACIP Vaccine Recommendations (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/covid-19.html).

- Ways to promote vaccines and access to getting vaccinated include:
  - Hosting on-campus vaccination clinics.
  - Promoting vaccines at events on campus.
  - Providing transportation to off-campus vaccination sites.
  - Using trusted people and sources to promote getting vaccinated and to address vaccine concerns.
  - Offering flexible sick leave or flexible excused absence options for those who experience side effects after receiving the vaccine.

- For more information visit:
  - Be a Vaccine Advocate: COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit for Individuals and Organizations (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/communitytk.html)
  - Host a Community COVID-19 Vaccination Event (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/vaccine/hostevent.html)
  - We Can Do This: College Students Toolkit — English/Spanish (wecandothis.hhs.gov/college-students-toolkit)

Implement masking to mitigate transmission

- Maintain institution-level requirements or recommendations on masks in indoor environments, especially when:
  - Institutions do not have a fully vaccinated campus or vaccination rates are unknown.
  - The campus is experiencing an increase in COVID-19 transmission. Refer to Scenario 2 and 3 of Recommendations for Responding to Different Scenarios of COVID-19 Transmission at Institutions of Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf).
  - The surrounding county has a substantial or high community transmission level. To find county-specific community transmission levels, refer to the CDC COVID Data Tracker: COVID-19 Integrated County View (covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view).

- Follow additional masking recommendations and requirements:

- ▪ CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html)
  Includes guidance on masking in higher education settings.

- ▪ Recommendations for Wearing Masks (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html)

- ▪ CDC: Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html)

- ▪ Promote a culture of mask acceptance for those who have not been vaccinated and for those who choose to wear masks even after fully vaccinated.

Encourage students, faculty, and staff to stay home when sick.

- ▪ Consider sick and leave policies that support flexibility in academic programming and work across the institution when necessary and possible.

- ▪ Post materials and send messages that encourage students and employees to be aware of their symptoms and to stay home if they are sick.

Maintain mitigation practices when hosting events.

CDC notes that crowded settings still present a greater risk of transmission among people who have not been fully vaccinated, especially when they bring together people of unknown vaccination status from different communities where community transmission is substantial to high. The following links provide suggestions on how to mitigate COVID-19 transmission when hosting a larger event (such as graduation, theater performances, etc.).

- ▪ Recommendations for Attendees and Organizers of Events: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/events.html)

- ▪ CDC: Event Planning FAQs (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/event-planners-and-attendees-faq.html)

Maintain support for workers and high-risk populations.

- ▪ Provide accommodations for higher risk and vulnerable populations. Learn about conditions that put people at high-risk: CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

- ▪ Employers must provide reasonable accommodations under existing federal and state law. Implement required Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) policies and protocols: OSHA: Protecting Workers: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace (www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework).

Include considerations of equity when developing protocols and policies.

CDC recognizes that long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19. American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic persons are disproportionately affected by COVID-19; these disparities exist among all age groups, including school-aged children and young adults.

Because of these disparities, institutions should take health equity considerations into account when promoting acces to vaccinations, testing, health care, and isolation and quarantine support; as well as when considering in-person, remote, or hybrid learning environments.

For more information on considerations around improving equity, visit:

- Health Equity and COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/about/covid19.html)

- CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html)
  Refer to the Health Equity section.

- CDC: Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html)

Support phased-in approaches to returning to campus (after summer, fall, winter, or spring breaks)

- Consider smaller activities or events at the beginning of the term, during welcome week activities, or at orientation events.

- Encourage holding activities outside as much as possible.

Evaluate and implement strategies for classrooms, gyms, dining halls, common areas, and other similar environments on campus

- In environments where students, staff, and faculty will have designated areas to sit or be stationed, institutions are encouraged to maintain an environment where extra spacing between people can be maintained.

- As an example, consider 3 feet social distancing in classrooms, or 6 feet social distancing in gyms; especially if institutions have low or unknown vaccination levels on campus.

- For common areas, consider spacing moveable furniture to minimize crowding and congestion in seating areas where possible.

- As an example, consider arranging chairs, tables, and furniture to support at least 6 feet between groups of people.

- In general, MDH does not recommend complete closure of common areas, as students will likely still gather in other areas, including in smaller rooms or areas that would promote transmission potential.

- If institutions begin to see an increase of COVID-19 activity on campus, they may need to take additional mitigation measures on their campus. Refer to Recommendations for Responding to Different Scenarios of COVID-19 Transmission at Institutions of Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf)

Implement housing plans that support reduced risks of transmission

- For institutions that have lower vaccination rates, consider lower occupancies in dorms or dorm rooms to reduce the overall number of students in the building and other strategies to relieve congestion.

- Encourage students in residence halls to get vaccinated by holding vaccination events and communicate that having more vaccinated students will allow for more activities.

- Additional considerations for housing can be found here: CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html).

Maintain and promote testing resources

Testing access is crucial to preventing COVID-19 transmission in higher education institutions. Institutions that do not have the ability to refer students, faculty, or staff to testing for COVID-19 may miss opportunities to quickly identify COVID-19 on campus.

- Consider promoting this link to increase access to COVID-19 testing: Find Testing Locations (mn.gov/covid19/get-tested/testing-locations/index.jsp).

  - For at-home or community testing resources, visit COVID-19 Testing (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/index.html)

- Institutions of higher education should:

  - Maintain the ability for students, faculty, or staff who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 to access testing resources.

  - Have the capacity to promote testing of close contacts, per recommendations and guidance by CDC and MDH: Close Contacts and Quarantine: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html).

  - Consider strategies for broader testing when there is a surge on campus, and work with the MDH IHE team if testing support is needed. Broader testing may also be recommended if there is ongoing transmission in an activity or dorm setting.

  - Please refer to the following document when experiencing a cluster of cases: Recommendations for Responding to COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Institutions of Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihecases.pdf)

  - You may also reach out to the IHE team at Health.HigherEd.COVID19@state.mn.us

- Other considerations for testing, as resources allow, include:

  - Implementing routine serial testing for those students and staff who are unvaccinated, especially those who are in higher-risk transmission settings, such as residential housing, or in activities that have tight social networks.

  - Testing a random sample of the campus population at the beginning of the term or after an extended break (such as fall, winter, or spring breaks).

  - Broad testing of the campus population at the beginning of each term.

  - Additional testing recommendations for higher education can be found at CDC: Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html#section3).

Maintain contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine processes

▪ Maintain the resources to follow-up and respond to clusters of cases and cases that occur in high-risk settings where increased transmission is likely to occur (such as residential housing, or in groups and activities where high rates of transmission occurred previously).

▪ Promote and make available information describing what someone should do if they have COVID-19 or are a close contact of someone who has it. Institutions may decide to provide links to the following resources:

  ▪ If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html)

    ▪ What to Do if You Have COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf)

    ▪ Tips to Remember Your COVID-19 Contacts (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tipscontact.pdf)

  ▪ Close Contacts and Quarantine: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html)

    ▪ What to Do if You Have Had Close Contact With a Person With COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf)

▪ Consider having isolation and quarantine accommodations for between 1% and 2.5% of the population who live on campus. We expect that as vaccination rates continue to increase, the need for isolation and quarantine space will decrease.

▪ For more details specific to higher education and isolation, quarantine, and exposure notification processes, refer to Recommendations for Responding to COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihecases.pdf).

▪ For people with COVID-19 like symptoms, refer to the K-12 Decision Tree when handling students, faculty, and staff with COVID-19-like symptoms: Recommended COVID-19 Decision Tree for People in Schools, Youth Programs, and Child Care Programs (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/exguide.pdf).

Monitor disease trends on campus and in your area to adjust mitigation levels as needed

▪ Report to MDH when cases exceed 3% of the total campus population within a 14-day period, or 8% test positivity in your health services clinic within a 14-day period; or when there is an unusual cluster of cases or an increase in disease severity.

▪ Adjust campus mitigation efforts based on disease transmission levels. Visit Recommendations for Responding to Different Scenarios of COVID-19 Transmission at Institutions of Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf).

▪ Use Public Health Risk Measures (mn.gov/covid19/data/response-prep/public-health-risk-measures.jsp) to stay informed about community activity.

Communicate key strategies to students and employees

The information contained in this section is information meant to be promoted directly to students, faculty, and staff.

Get vaccinated!

- Find My Vaccine (mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/find-vaccine/index.jsp)
- CDC: Myths and Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html)

Mask up!

- Recommendations for Wearing Masks (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html)

Stay home when sick (or have tested positive)!

Students, faculty, and staff who test positive for COVID-19 should stay home and notify their close contacts and appropriate campus COVID-19 contact:

- If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html)
- What to Do if You Have COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/case.pdf)
- Close Contacts and Quarantine: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html)
- What to Do if You Have Had Close Contact with a Person With COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/contact.pdf)
- Tips to Remember Your COVID-19 Contacts (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tipscontact.pdf)

Plan before travel!

Follow MDH and CDC guidance for travel to or from campus.

- Protect Yourself & Others: Traveling (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#travel)
- CDC: COVID-19 Travel (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html)

Higher education resources

- Institutes of Higher Education (IHE): COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html)
  Main MDH webpage for higher education.

- Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education for the Fall Semester 2021 (www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_for_Fall_2021_5.25.21.pdf)
  American College Health Association (ACHA) guidelines.

- COVID-19 Resources (www.acha.org/ACHA/Resources/COVID-19_Novel_Coronavirus/ACHA/Resources/Topics/2019_Novel_Coronavirus_2019-nCoV.aspx)
  American College Health Association.

- Guidance for for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html)
  CDC guidance for institutions of higher education.

- Coronavirus Updates & Resources for Campus Recreation (nirsa.net/nirsa/covid19/)
  National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association's updates.

MINNESOTA

Minnesota Department of Health | health.mn.gov | 651-201-5000
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.