

New COVID-Cautious Recommendations for Higher Education

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The Pennsylvania Departments of Health (DOH) and Education are now strongly encouraging colleges and universities in the state to implement testing and screening strategies for students, faculty, and staff.

The state also is strongly encouraging schools to enact regimented mask usage, hand sanitizing, social distancing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine procedures to ensure a reduced level of transmission among the school and surrounding community.

The state sees this as a critical time for transmission of COVID-19 on college campuses as students head home for Thanksgiving and then return to school for the final few weeks of the semester, not to mention the upcoming winter break when they will again return home and then come back to campus in January or February.

Colleges likely have been working on a plan to address these concerns for months, but now is the time to make sure it's ready to go. Here is what the state is recommending:

Implement a testing strategy

Test all students upon return to campus from extended breaks. Each student should be tested twice, with four days in between the administration of each test. If more frequent testing is desired, the Centers for Disease Control recommends that to make a decision, a school should be looking at the available resources, the capacity within the institution for follow-up and contact tracing, the availability of isolation facilities, and the levels of community transmission. If an institution has limited resources, it should establish priorities for directing its testing capabilities toward the most pressing situations. Such a hierarchy should prioritize first testing campus community members who are exhibiting coronavirus symptoms and others who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Partner with a health care provider

Most colleges aren't equipped to determine the best methods for a plan, but their local health care provider likely is. Providers can help determine which testing method is best suited for each college's situation and can help develop a contact tracing plan. Keeping documented records, such as assigned seats, attendance and records of individuals entering and exiting buildings will help the efficiency and effectiveness of contact tracing.

Implement an isolation and quarantine strategy

A person must isolate for at least 10 days upon diagnosis with COVID-19. If a person continues to suffer from

COVID-19 after 10 days, the college shouldn't just release that person. A 14-day quarantine period is required for those who are at-risk for contracting the virus because they have come in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with the virus. Have designated isolation and quarantine locations on campus and ensure daily wellness checks on the individuals in those locations, as well as delivery of meals and other necessities.

Determine priorities

Each institution is different and has a community with a variety of needs. However, all institutions should be focusing on protecting vulnerable students, faculty and staff, and limiting transmission to outside communities.

Create a communication plan

Develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to keep the institution and surrounding community safe. The communication plan should discuss testing strategies, testing locations, contact people for individuals concerned about exposure and an overview of quarantine procedures.

Stay connected

Encourage students and staff to use the [COVID Alert PA](#) app, which was created by DOH to help slow the spread by using Bluetooth Low Energy technology to alert people when they may have come in contact with a person who has tested positive.

Follow all CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines

Although it should go without saying, continuing the use of masks, hand sanitizer, and social distancing methods is important to slowing transmission of COVID-19.

Stay updated CDC's website [here](#). If you have any questions on the how your higher education institute can develop COVID-19 safety measures, please contact [David Freedman](#), chair of the [Barley Snyder Education Practice Group](#).

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