Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions

3/25/2021

Executive Order 21-11 began Monday, March 15, 2021, at 12 p.m. (noon) and does not have an end date. Effective March 31, 2021, at 11:59 p.m., larger venues, restaurants, gyms, and pools will be able to expand their occupancy per the Stay Safe Industry Guidance (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp). Effective April 14, 2021, at 11:59 p.m., the requirement to work from home shifts to a strong recommendation.

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

The Stay Safe MN website may be updated with frequently asked questions about the Governor’s Executive Orders and related industry guidance. These frequently asked questions may also include clarifications to the requirements and recommendations in Executive Orders and guidance. See Frequently Asked Questions about Stay Safe MN (mn.gov/covid19/stay-safe/faq/index.jsp) or Stay Safe Industry Guidance (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp).

Updates to this guidance include:

- Updates to social gatherings (throughout).
- Updates to classroom size (page 3).
- Updated guidance for fitness facilities, gyms, weight rooms, and field houses to reflect new occupancy requirements (page 10).
- Additional updates throughout for clarity and readability.

Clarification of definitions for institutes of higher education

- Indoor social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 15 people. Outdoor social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 50 people. When gathering, students should form household-like pods and keep the pods separated by at least 6 feet.

- Households:
  - Students returning home over a break are not considered a separate household from others in the home they are returning to; however, they should follow recommendations for when or if

- For the purpose of residential campuses, household-like pods should be considered as those students living in the same smaller section of housing, such as a floor of a dorm or floor of a residence hall. Institutions may also permit pods to be formed based on other criteria, such as a friend group, student group, or an athletic team that consistently brings the same people together.

Background

Executive Order 21-11 requires Institutes of Higher Education (“IHE” or “institutions”) to have a Higher Education Plan that follows the requirements in this guidance, along with other applicable Stay Safe Industry Guidance (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp). Under this guidance, institutes of higher education are allowed to have in-person classes if they follow the parameters outlined in this document.

In developing this guidance, MDH reviewed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Guidance for Higher Education, the American College Health Association, and recommendations from the MDH Higher Education workgroups, composed of representatives from colleges and universities across Minnesota. Additionally, this guidance was developed taking into account parameters and capacities already set forth in other state guidance documents, including Stay Safe Industry Guidance and MDH’s guidance for pre-kindergarten through grade 12 schools. In general, the parameters set out in this document are consistent with capacity limits that apply to other settings. Where this higher education guidance differs from the requirements that apply to other settings, additional precautions are required to produce the same result – social distancing and reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. For example, the higher education guidance does not specify a percentage limit on classroom capacity, unlike like the guidance for seated entertainment. In seated entertainment venues, household groups often sit together without 6 feet of space between people from the same household. By contrast, this higher education guidance requires 6 feet between all people, which naturally controls attendance in classrooms, eliminating the need for a percentage limit on capacity.

Requirements for higher education

- Develop a COVID-19 Preparedness Plan found at Stay Safe Guidance for All Businesses (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/all-businesses.jsp).


- Create policies that adhere to the Governor’s Executive Order 20-81, which states that people in Minnesota will be required to wear a face covering in all public indoor spaces and businesses. Workers are also required to wear face coverings outdoors in situations where social distancing cannot be maintained.
Classroom occupancy should be limited to no more than 50 students whenever possible. Classes must follow the below requirements, which vary by class size.

For classes that have fewer than 50 students:

- The institution must require that students and workers maintain 6 feet of social distance as much as possible.
  - Allowances for shorter distances can be made, such as in classrooms that have fixed seats/tables, or in settings where there needs to be closer collaboration like in labs, and where 6 feet of social distancing can’t be maintained.
  - In these settings use assigned seating/seating charts or assigned partners or groups in order to minimize potential exposure and to expedite follow-up should an exposure occur.
  - Remember: If an individual is diagnosed with COVID-19, all persons who were within 6 feet from the positive case for greater than 15 minutes while the person was infectious, or who had direct physical contact, would be considered exposed and would likely be advised to quarantine.

For classes that have greater than 50 students:

- In class sizes of 51-100 students, all students and workers must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet, without exception. Additional monitoring (beyond the instructor) is encouraged to ensure that students follow social distancing measures.

- If a class must be larger than 100 students, all students and workers must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet, without exception. Additional monitoring (beyond the instructor) is required to ensure that students follow social distancing requirements.
  - Additional monitoring means that the institution must designate students or additional staff or instructors to monitor adherence to social distancing requirements. Initially, these student and staff monitors must be present at the start of every class. As the term progresses, institutions may gradually lessen the frequency of monitoring to occasional “spot checks,” assuming students and staff have adhered to social distancing expectations throughout the term.

- Classes may only exceed 250 students if the institution follows the requirements for managing occupancy in the applicable Stay Safe Guidance for Entertainment and Meeting Venues (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/entertainment.jsp). In the context of classes, the Guidance for Entertainment and Meeting Venues must be used only to calculate allowable occupancy, and the more specific requirements in this guidance (e.g., requirements for social distancing and monitoring) apply in all other situations. All requirements that apply to classes larger than 100 students, above, apply equally to classes that exceed 250 students.

- Develop plans that address returning to campus, testing needs, contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine as appropriate.

- Provide accommodations for “high risk” and vulnerable populations. See CDC: People at Increased Risk (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html).
Indoor social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 15 people. Outdoor social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 50 people. When gathering, students should form household-like pods and keep the pods separated by 6 feet. This guidance also applies to study groups.

In all other settings, maintain social distancing as is indicated in this guidance and other setting-specific guidance. This includes interpretive guidance for the learning environments, dining halls, housing, and other settings where students gather.

Students returning home over a break are not considered a separate household from their family; however, they should follow recommendations from MDH on Institutes of Higher Education (IHE): COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html).

Household-like pods: For the purpose of residential campuses household-like pods should be considered as those students living in the same section of housing, such as a floor or independent wing of a dorm or a resident hall. Institutions may also permit pods to be formed based on other criteria, such as a friend group, student group, or an athletic pod that consistently brings the same people together.

Incorporate appropriate guidance listed below into the COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.

Additional guidance for higher education

The guidance listed below are recommendations from OHE and MDH on how to implement the above requirements as colleges and universities continue the current educational year.

Higher education in Minnesota is diverse, including to the extent there is a residential component. Each institution will have to implement the following guidance in a way that is most applicable and feasible to its unique setting. As such, institutions should think through the following scenarios and guidance as they create their plans. As plans develop, please continue to reach out to OHE and MDH as needed.

This guidance document was developed using the Minnesota Higher Education Workgroup Proposed Strategies, and the following resources:

- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/)
- Minnesota industry-specific guidance at DEED: Guidance on Safely Reopening Minnesota Businesses (mn.gov/deed/newscenter/covid/safework/safe-reopening/).

Create different scenario plans for COVID-19

Create scenario plans for how your institution will:
RETURN TO CAMPUS AFTER A BREAK, INCLUDING TIMELINES AND STEPS TO BRINGING PEOPLE BACK ON CAMPUS TO MINIMIZE CONGESTION.

MONITOR BOTH ILLNESS AND OVERALL STUDENT, FACULTY, AND STAFF’S COOPERATION WITH PREVENTION MEASURES, SUCH AS PHYSICAL DISTANCING, FACIAL COVERINGS, ETC.

▪ ADJUST COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING AS NEEDED TO IMPROVE COOPERATION WITH PREVENTION MEASURES.

PARTNER WITH MDH AND CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS WHEN IT OCCURS.

SCALE BACK OPERATIONS IF DISEASE LEVELS INDICATE A NEED FOR CHANGES IN OPERATIONS, INCLUDING:

▪ REDUCING THE NUMBER OR CANCELING EVENTS AND PROGRAMS.
▪ SHUTTING DOWN IF DIRECTED TO BY THE STATE OR AS A RESULT OF A SIGNIFICANT OUTBREAK ON CAMPUS, OR IN SURROUNDING COMMUNITY.

CREATE SCENARIOS FOR CAMPUS LIFE AND CLASSROOM SETTINGS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

▪ CURRENT SOCIAL DISTANCING GUIDANCE INCLUDES AT LEAST A 6-FOOT DISTANCE FROM PERSON-CENTER TO PERSON-CENTER.
▪ IF NOT ABLE TO MAINTAIN A 6-FOOT SOCIAL DISTANCE, CONSIDER HAVING SEATING ASSIGNMENTS OR ASSIGNING PARTNERS.
▪ SEATING ASSIGNMENTS WILL ENSURE EASY AND QUICK CONTACT TRACING.
▪ A STAY-AT-HOME ORDER IS IMPLEMENTED, SIMILAR TO WHAT HAPPENED THIS SPRING.

DOMAINS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATEING THE ABOVE PLANS INCLUDE: INSTRUCTION DELIVERY; INSTRUCTION SCHEDULE; CLASSROOMS; LIBRARIES; STUDY SPACES; LAB INSTRUCTION; STUDIO INSTRUCTION; OUTREACH; HOUSING; HOUSING OCCUPANCY; RESIDENTIAL DINING; RETAIL DINING AND CATERING; REC CENTERS; STUDENT UNIONS; STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMMING; AND EVENTS.

STRATEGIZE FOR ON-CAMPUS LEARNING

▪ MOST INSTITUTIONS ARE WELL INTO THE 2020-2021 LEARNING YEAR, THOUGH SOME DO HAVE ROLLING OR STAGGERED START DATES THROUGHOUT THE CALENDAR YEAR. MDH HAS ALSO ADVISED INSTITUTIONS TO CONSIDER DELAYED OR STAGGERED STARTS AS A MEANS OF MINIMIZING THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSMISSION. FOR STUDENTS JUST BEGINNING ON-CAMPUS LEARNING:
▪ CONSIDER OR CONTINUE TO USE A RANGE OF START TIMES FOR RETURNING STUDENTS BACK TO CAMPUS. THIS CAN RANGE FROM ON-TIME, EARLY, OR DELAYED. THIS INCLUDES STRATEGIES SUCH AS HAVING AN EARLIER OR LATER START DATE, AND/OR EXPANDING OR REMOVING BREAKS TO MITIGATE THE AMOUNT COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE GOING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN COMMUNITIES.
▪ CONSIDER OR CONTINUE PHASING-IN OF STUDENTS; SOME INSTITUTIONS ARE STAGGERING HOW THEY RETURN STUDENTS TO CAMPUS, BY BRINGING DIFFERENT CLASSES OR DIFFERENT GROUPS FIRST TO ALLOW FOR THE REDUCTION OF CONGESTION.
- Make clear that students, faculty, and staff should not return to campus if they are sick; ensure sick and leave policies support a delayed start when necessary.

Planned academic breaks

- Encourage students to lay low (minimize going out or socializing with others) for 14 days before leaving to celebrate holidays, spring break, or before other travel.
- Encourage students, faculty, and staff to get tested about a week before travel.
- Once students return:
  - For residential campuses, encourage students to get tested about 7 days after returning from travels
  - For non-residential campus, encourage students to get tested about 7 days after returning from travel, especially if their travel involved being around a lot of other people (airports, bus, etc.)

Phase in campus activities when returning from break

- Continue to support campus activities in a way that reduces transmission potential of COVID-19.
- Consider canceling large events or activities during the first couple of weeks of bringing students back to campus.
- Replace with activities or events that can be held with smaller groups of people.
- Structure events or activities so that attendees are divided into smaller groups.
- Ensure social distancing and face covering requirements during the activity.

Implement measures for preventing COVID-19 transmission

The following measures contribute to a layered approach in disease mitigation; each layer that can be added provides extra support for preventing transmission. This is important to keep in mind as colleges and universities navigate the uniqueness of their institution.

- Ensure students/staff/vendors adhere to social distancing protocols.
- Follow face covering guidance listed below.
- Institute hand hygiene protocols, including “sanitize-in and sanitize-out” protocols for classrooms and other learning settings.
- Develop a protocol to quickly identify sick students, faculty, or staff.
  - Have symptom check signs at key entry points such as when entering a classroom, libraries, or dining halls.
  - The Visitor and Employee Health Screening checklist is available in English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish. See Businesses and Employers: COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/businesses.html).
In general, being outside reduces transmission between individuals. It is strongly recommended that in settings where individuals, classes, or activities can be outside, that they do so.

### Implement policies for face coverings

As of July 25, 2020, per the Governor’s Executive Order, people in Minnesota are required to wear a face covering in all public indoor spaces and businesses. Workers are also required to wear face coverings outdoors when social distancing cannot be maintained. This Executive Order includes exemptions for people who are unable to wear or tolerate a face covering due to medical or other reasons. There are also situations in which a face covering may be temporarily removed or where face coverings are not required.

For the best protection against COVID-19, your mask must have at least two layers of tightly woven fabric, cover your nose and mouth completely and fit snugly against your face without gaps.

### When face coverings are required:

- Students, faculty, and staff must wear a face covering while indoors, unless an exemption applies.
- Those teaching a class or course must wear a face covering or face shield unless physical distance of 6 feet or greater can be maintained at all times from students in their class.
- Staff and faculty must wear face coverings when working outdoors in areas where social distancing of 6 feet or more cannot be maintained.
- For further requirements and exemptions, see: [Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).
  - Notwithstanding Executive Order 20-81, students exercising in a gym, fitness center, indoor sports facility, or other similar setting must wear a face covering at all times, regardless of the level of physical exertion.

### When face coverings are strongly encouraged:

- Even when outside, it is strongly recommended that students wear face coverings while in areas of high congestion of people or where social distancing of 6 feet or more cannot be maintained.
- Other situations where face coverings are strongly encouraged can be found at [Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations](www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).

Face shields (a clear plastic barrier that covers the face) may be considered as an alternative in situations where face coverings are not practicable. Social distancing is particularly important when using a face shield as an alternative, as they are less protective than face coverings. Examples include:

- Faculty teaching a class or giving a lecture, or for students taking a language class where the face needs to be seen. A face shield allows visibility of facial expressions and lip movements for speech perception.
Staff and students in a class where face coverings may be a hazard due to the nature of the class (e.g., laboratory component of a class).

Staff, students, or visitors who cannot tolerate a face covering due to developmental, medical, or behavioral health condition.

For staff or faculty providing direct support student services, when a face covering impedes the service being provided.

Paragraph 10 of Executive Order 20-81 outlines a number of situations where face coverings may be removed temporarily, and are modified in certain settings (e.g., gyms and fitness centers) by Executive Orders 21-11. For more information about face covering requirements, recommendations, and exemptions, see:

- Face Covering Requirements and Recommendations (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html)
- Masks and face coverings (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html#masks)
- Frequently Asked Questions About the Requirement to Wear Face Coverings (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecoverfaq.html)

Promote norms

- Communicate with students, faculty, and staff new COVID-19 mitigation expectations. Use media, posters, and other tactics to promote health etiquette expectations and behavioral norms.
- Engage students, faculty, and staff in developing creative promotion of new norms and solutions to concerns about changing norms.
- Use visuals and barriers to support social distancing.
- Maintain a task force to focus on how to implement social and cultural changes to behavior norms to support COVID-19 mitigation efforts.
- Promote face covering requirements and recommendations.

Reimagine the learning environment

- Develop a hybrid learning environment that allows in-person and online coursework, activities, and engagement opportunities. This also allows learning flexibility if students or faculty need to continue courses while sick or in quarantine.
- Refer to the classroom total occupancy capacity limitations discussed on pages 2 and 3 of this document.
- Other ways to support social distancing in classrooms, labs, and other learning settings.
  - Host classes with small enrollment in larger rooms.
  - Provide adequate distance between individuals engaged in experiential learning opportunities (e.g., labs, vocational skill building activities).
▪ Create distance between students in college or university vehicles (e.g., skipping rows).
▪ Offer distance learning in addition to in-person classes to help reduce the number of in-person attendees.
▪ Consider moving large classes to online only, break out into smaller sessions, or rotate pods of in-person vs online (Pod A is in-person Monday/Tuesday, online Wednesday/Thursday, Pod B vice versa).
  ▪ For example, for any class of 100 students or more consider splitting the class into separate cohorts or moving the class to a different learning format.
▪ Reduce bottlenecks when students come into and leave class. Consider creating one-way guides, or directing flow in narrow hallways or in areas where congestion is high.
▪ In settings like labs or art studios where individuals may have to work side-by-side, cloth face coverings in addition to face shields/googles should be considered.
▪ Follow MDH’s Music Activities and Performances During COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/musicguide.pdf). This guidance should be followed for all music-related activities including voice and musical instrument lessons, choir, bands, and orchestra.

Reconfigure and reimagine dining halls

▪ Arrange chairs to support distancing of at least 6 feet apart to the extent possible.
  ▪ If not feasible, consider limiting number of people to three or four persons per table, and less when there is significant transmission in the community or on campus.
  ▪ Generally, students should sit with individuals they are already in frequent contact with to minimize the risk of transmission outside of normal student or friend groups.
  ▪ For table settings that include a long row of tables, stagger chairs and try to maintain 6 feet between chairs as much as possible.
▪ Ensure least 6 feet between diners at different tables.
▪ Take other steps to reduce congestion.
  ▪ Assign students specified times to come to the dining hall, making a “reservation system,” or altering course schedules to reduce potential congestion.
  ▪ Have more grab-and-go options available.
  ▪ Have fewer people in dining hall at any one time.
  ▪ If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. People should wash their hands after removing gloves or after directly handling used food service items; see CDC: When and How to Wash Your Hands (www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html).
Follow gyms, studios, fitness centers, and field house guidance

Through March 31, 2021, gyms, fitness facilities, studios, weight rooms, and field houses can be open up to 50% normal occupant capacity with no more than 250 people per facility for recreational use. Effective April 1, 2021, some facilities with sufficient space may be able to increase their maximum allowable occupancy according to the Stay Safe Guidance for Gyms, Studios, and Fitness Centers (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/gyms-studios-fitness-centers.jsp).

- Those people using the gym for recreational purposes must comply with the following requirements:
  - Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet in all areas of the facility, including where people are exercising or engaging in physical activity.
  - Wear face coverings at all times.
  - Group fitness classes cannot exceed 25 people indoor, or 50 outdoors. The maximum number of people allowed in a fitness class may be less depending on the size of the class area (refer to the Stay Safe Guidance for Gyms, Studios, and Fitness Centers for more information about how to calculate the maximum allowable size of a fitness class).

- Through March 31, 2021:
  - People using the gym to attend a course or fulfill a practicum do not count toward the 250 cap, but do count toward the 50% overall facility limit.
  - Intercollegiate athletes gathering for a team practice or game do not count toward the 250 cap, but do count toward the 50% overall facility limit.

- Effective April 1, 2021:
  - Follow the applicable formulas and overall maximum occupancy limits in the Stay Safe Guidance for Gyms, Studios, and Fitness Centers (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/gyms-studios-fitness-centers.jsp).

Implement housing plans that support reduced risks of transmission

- Ensure there is enough space for heads to be at least 6 feet apart in shared dorm rooms.
- Consider reducing the number of students per room or per dorm to promote reducing number of close contacts if one person becomes sick.
- Strongly consider not having dorms at full capacity to reduce overall number of students in the building and therefore resulting congestion.
- When feasible, add physical barriers, such as plastic flexible screens or shower curtains, between bathroom sinks or other areas that cannot be at least 6 feet apart. If difficult to achieve, place signage to maintain proper physical distancing of 6 feet and limit capacity in the shared bathroom.
Evaluate other settings where students gather on campus

- Maintain at least 6 feet in public settings, except in situations where greater flexibility is provided in this guidance (e.g., social gatherings among household-like pods).
- For common areas: arrange chairs and tables to support at least 6 feet between people as much as possible, and at least 6 feet between common furniture.
  - Space furniture out such that gatherings are contained, that there is adequate space between groups, and that crowding is minimized.
  - Restrict number of people allowed in the common area.
  - Consider temporarily closing off a specific common area if social distancing rules are not being followed.
- Implement ongoing evaluations and monitoring of student and staff behavior and continue to adjust approaches, communication, messaging, or education needs to help continue to guide appropriate behaviors and norms. Behaviors include cooperation with prevention measures such as physical distancing, facial coverings, etc.
- In general, MDH does not recommend complete closure of common areas as students will likely still gather in other areas. These gathering spots may be in smaller rooms or areas that would promote transmission potential.
- If facility showers need to be used, only allow shower and locker room use if there are partitions or else place signage to maintain proper physical distancing of 6 feet.
- For colleges or universities with students living in off-campus housing, consider reaching out to landlords of units known to be commonly rented by students to explore partnerships in preventing COVID-19.
- Reserve space or create a plan to be able to adequately isolate sick people and quarantine close contacts when planning for on-campus housing.

Create testing plans for suspect COVID-19 cases

Testing access

- Testing access is crucial to preventing COVID-19 transmission in higher education institutions. Without the ability to refer students, faculty, or staff to testing for COVID-19, there may be missed opportunities to quickly identify COVID-19 on your campus.
- Provide resources for testing for people who are symptomatic.
  - Consider promoting link to where people can find COVID-19 testing: Find Testing Locations (mn.gov/covid19/get-tested/testing-locations/index.jsp).
- Institutes of Higher Education should also:
  - Have the capacity to test close contacts per recommendations and guidance by CDC and MDH.
  - Consider strategies for broader testing when bringing students back to campus after breaks, and also consider ongoing surveillance or screening opportunities as testing resources allow.
Testing strategies

- Promote and set expectations now for students to get tested.
- If a student, faculty, or staff tests positive for COVID-19, the case will be reported to MDH/Local Public Health (LPH) by the testing lab or provider. MDH/LPH will do the case and contact investigation and follow-up with the college or university. Some colleges and universities are doing their own or additional case and contact investigations. See the Case and Contact Tracing Section of this document for more details.
- MDH recommends that close contacts of a case of COVID-19 be tested regardless of whether or not symptoms are present, this testing should be done around 7 days after exposure.
- If a campus sees a cluster of three or more cases in a short time span:
  - MDH or LPH can work with the campus to determine if cases are related.
  - Decisions to do wider testing will be made using the following criteria:
    - Are cases close in time together, or spread out over several weeks?
    - Are new cases traceable to previous cases?
    - Is there other case activity on campus?
    - Are students being forthcoming with close contacts?
  - MDH or LPH may recommend any of the following testing strategies depending on the epidemiology of the cases. These may include testing broadly on:
    - A floor.
    - A residence hall.
    - A team, club, class, or activity.
  - Broader campus or community testing may be warranted if a campus continues to see an increase in cases and other control measures are not preventing further transmission.
- Depending on testing availability and community transmission, college campuses can consider any of the following:
  - Broad testing of a campus before students leave campus or after students return to the campus.
  - Ongoing testing of certain sub-groups, such as:
    - Students who are health care workers.
    - Student-teachers.
    - Athletes.
    - Musicians or vocalists.
    - Other groups where ongoing transmission is seen.
  - Ongoing random sampling of the student population, examples include weekly testing of 10-15% of the student population.
Implement contact tracing processes

MDH or LPH will support contact tracing and do the majority of the case investigations. In some situations, a third-party case and contact investigator will be used; however, the overall process outlined below will remain the same. Below is an outline of case and contact tracing and the expectations of the institution in partnering with MDH or LPH.

It is important to consider how an institution will maintain privacy of student, faculty, and staff as much as possible. Colleges/universities should consult with their lawyer regarding the sharing of private health information. It is important that institutions and people who work there only share protected health information with those they are legally able to share it with. Higher education should take this into consideration as they develop their notification plans. In general, colleges/universities may want to consider having a point person/point phone number that students, faculty, and staff use first when identifying themselves as a case. This will also help prevent accidental notification of classes or campus prior to an investigation.

For more information, see Guidance for COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihecases.pdf).

Case and contact investigation flow

- Once a person tests positive for COVID-19:
  - The case (the person who tested positive) is notified by their testing facility.
  - The testing facility and/or the lab also reports to MDH.
    - Occasionally the testing facility will report to the case before the lab report reaches MDH. This is most likely to occur if the testing facility performs the test in its own facility.
  - The case is usually reported to MDH through electronic lab reporting, occasionally it is first reported by the health care provider.
  - Schools are able and encouraged to submit cases to MDH via REDCap or via email, especially if the case and/or the school has not been contacted by MDH.
    - REDCap survey to submit cases: COVID-19 College and University Case Reporting (https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=KWF3TMAX7E).
  - Once the lab report is received, MDH/LPH interviews the case by phone. During the interview MDH/LPH:
    - Determines individual contacts.
    - Determines other settings of potential contacts (classroom, bar, gym, etc.).
    - Close contacts are individuals who were closer than 6 feet to the case for 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. If individuals are identified as being close contacts, there are two ways those contacts can be notified.
      - The case chooses to have MDH/LPH give them information to share with their contacts (so MDH/LPH doesn’t call the contact directly).
• The case shares the contact’s information and MDH/LPH follow-up with those contacts.

• MDH/LPH reaches out to colleges/universities to notify them of the case and any contacts associated with the college/university.

• MDH/LPH will work with the college/university to recommend what notification would be warranted. This could include a general campus message, messaging specific to a certain classroom or area on campus in which exposure may have occurred, or messaging specific to people who may have been exposed. Messaging may also include information on the level of risk.

• Often colleges/universities will have more information on students, and in some situations may end up helping MDH/LPH further determine contacts in various settings.

• MDH/LPH also notifies other settings outside the college/university as appropriate.

• Colleges/universities will work with LPH/MDH to:
  • Provide and/or recommend isolation and quarantine as needed and appropriate.
    • Strategies may be different for residential and non-residential institutions.
  • Work with MDH/LPH to reach any cases or their contacts that MDH/LPH has not been able to reach.

• Each institution should have at least one person that can be a COVID-19 point person who can assist with the above tasks. This person should be readily available during the day, including weekends. MDH/LPH recognizes that some institutions may choose different COVID-19 liaisons for students and/or faculty and staff.

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Create isolation and quarantine plans

• A close contact of a person with COVID-19 should stay at home for 14 days from the last time they had close contact. In some situations, there are options to shorten the quarantine period, see below.

• Quarantining is not required for a close contact who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 90 days and has already recovered.

• If someone has completed COVID-19 vaccination (two doses in a two-dose series or one dose in a one-dose series) and is exposed, they do not need to quarantine if ALL of the following are true:
  • The COVID-19 exposure was at least 14 days after their vaccination series was fully completed.
  • They do not currently have any symptoms of COVID-19.

• Colleges or universities may allow for individuals who have been exposed to quarantine for shorter amounts of time:
  • Campuses can consider a 10-day quarantine period, even among roommates as long as separate isolation and quarantine spaces can be maintained for those roommates. MDH also continues to recommend to test all close contacts of a case around day 7.
▪ For students who are in on-campus congregate residences, it is not recommended to use the seven-day quarantine period.
  ▪ This is due to the risk of the impact of transmission in these settings. Using the 14-day or 10-day quarantine is recommended, due to the high risk of transmission.

▪ Please note: Any shortened quarantine still requires individuals to monitor symptoms out to day 14, wear face coverings, maintain at least 6 feet of social distancing from others, and get tested right away if symptoms develop.

▪ Further guidelines for length of quarantine can be found at Quarantine Guidance for COVID-19 (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/quarguide.pdf).

▪ Have spaces set aside for sick and/or quarantined students. Examples include:
  ▪ Dedicated floors or residence halls.
  ▪ Reach out to area hotels in advance to discuss options for possible short notice to house students.

▪ Consider having in reserve isolation and/or quarantine accommodations for between 2.5% and 5% of the population who lives on campus.

▪ Provide guidance for isolation (students who have been diagnosed with COVID-19).
  ▪ Isolation rooms should be physically separated from other residential student rooms.
  ▪ Ideally a person in isolation will have their own bedroom and bathroom.
    ▪ If a shared bathroom or bedroom needs to occur, ensure that students sharing a space have been tested for COVID-19 and are both positive for COVID-19.
  ▪ Students in isolation must have access to alternative modes of course instruction
  ▪ Isolated students should have access to supplies such as a thermometer, face coverings, sanitizing wipes, tissues, soap, hand sanitizer, and toiletries.
  ▪ Students in isolation should have their food delivered, and access to laundry services; health checks should be virtual when possible.
  ▪ Staff who need to interact with students should have appropriate personal protective equipment.
  ▪ Students in isolation should not have any visitors.

▪ Requirements for quarantine (students who have been exposed but don’t yet have symptoms).
  ▪ Students, faculty, and staff who are still within 90 days of having tested positive for COVID-19 do not need to quarantine if they are exposed to a person infectious with COVID-19.

▪ Additional recommendations for quarantine:
  ▪ Ideally an individual in quarantine should have their own bedroom and bathroom.
    ▪ If people who are in quarantine need to share a bathroom, consider the following strategies:
      ▪ For a single bathroom – have the student clean and disinfect after using.
▪ For a common bathroom – have a designated stall and sink for the student and have them wear face coverings whenever leaving their room to use the bathroom facilities.

▪ Students in quarantine should have their food delivered, have access to laundry services, and health checks should be virtual.

▪ Students in quarantine must have access to alternative modes of course instruction.

▪ Students in quarantine should have access to supplies such as a thermometer, face coverings, sanitizing wipes, tissues, soap, hand sanitizer, and toiletries.

▪ Staff who need to interact with students should have appropriate personal protective equipment.

▪ Students in quarantine should not have any visitors.

▪ Set expectations for parents that an option may be for their student (or child) to move home for the duration of isolation or quarantine.

▪ CDC has guidance on how to safely care for a person who is sick. See If You Are Sick or Caring for Someone (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html).

▪ In situations where there are multiple cases on a floor in a dorm, MDH may recommend a broader testing strategy. We may even recommend that the floor quarantine together with repeated testing on day 7 and 14. People who test positive would be recommended to move to another location.

▪ For more detailed information, see Isolation and Quarantine Quick Reference Guidance for Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iheisolation.pdf).

Develop policies that promote the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19

▪ Develop a task force to address the needs of high-risk students, staff, and faculty and ensure that those who are high risk are included in surge capacity planning.

▪ Offer options for faculty and staff at higher risk for severe illness (including older adults and people of all ages with certain underlying medical conditions) that limit their exposure risk (e.g., telework and modified job responsibilities).

▪ Offer options for students at higher risk for severe illness that limit their exposure risk (e.g. virtual learning opportunities).

▪ Put in place policies to protect the privacy of people at higher risk for severe illness regarding underlying medical conditions in compliance with applicable federal and state privacy and confidentiality laws.

▪ Review applicable CDC guidance:
Response and surge capacity considerations


Monitor disease trends and activity in your area


- Have expectations for students depending on the level of activity on your campus, and in some cases in your surrounding community. Examples may include:
  - Ask students to not frequent bars or other settings known to have high transmission potential.
Cancel or limit events on campus that would facilitate large groups of individuals coming together.

Reinforce face covering requirements and recommendations.

**Ventilation on campus**

- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to students, faculty, or staff using the facility. See [CDC: Considerations for Institutes of Higher Education](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html).

- Work with your facility’s engineers to consider the following recommendations:
  - [Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response Resources from ASHRAE and Others](https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/resources).

**Cleaning and disinfecting**

Follow MDH-specific guidance for Institutes of Higher Education:

- [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/cleanihe.html)

- [Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 for Facilities Service and Cleaning Staff](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/cleanfaq.html)

As long as routine cleaning and disinfecting have taken place regularly, additional cleaning and disinfecting is likely not necessary; nor in most situations is it necessary to close down a room or area for 24 hours.

**Future guidance**

This document offers broad scope guidance. MDH will update strategies and guidance as more is learned from experiences in Minnesota and as recommended by the CDC.
Higher education resources


Other resources

- MDH Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/)
- For events or meetings that the university may host, see industry guidance at Stay Safe Industry Guidance (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/index.jsp)
- MDH Guidance Library (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/guidance.html)
- Food Service Worker Safety Information (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/foodservice.pdf)
- COVID-19 Preparedness Plan Requirements for Restaurants and Bars on Stay Safe Guidance for Restaurants and Bars (staysafe.mn.gov/industry-guidance/restaurants-bars.jsp)
- Recommendations for Different Levels of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/iherecs.pdf)
- Guidance for COVID-19 Cases and Outbreaks in Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihecases.pdf)
- COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education (www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/cleanihe.html)