

# COVID-19 Planning and Response for Institutions of Higher Education

8/14/23

Institutions of higher education (IHE) can support safe, in-person learning while implementing recommendations to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This guidance provides recommendations informed by the [CDC: COVID-19 by County \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html) and provides flexibility to allow for changing local situations, including periods of increased community health impacts from COVID-19.

## Management of cases and exposures

Although COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing in IHE are no longer routinely recommended, students, faculty, and staff should notify their close contacts when they have symptoms of or test positive for COVID-19.

IHE should provide instructions to students, faculty, and staff members who have symptoms of, test positive for, or are exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., stay home and away from others when you have symptoms, get tested for COVID-19, follow isolation and exposure recommendations).

## Resources:

- [If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html)
- [Close Contact or Exposure to COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html)
- [Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19 \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html)
- Medication information for those at high risk of severe disease: Learn more at [COVID-19 Medication \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html). You can find information on conditions that place people at higher risk of severe disease, at [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

## Isolation

If a person has symptoms of, or tests positive for COVID-19, they should isolate for at least five days and wear a mask through day 10 when around others. Day zero is the day symptoms started or, if the person does not have symptoms, the day they got tested. CDC has testing criteria under which a person may be able to shorten the masking period.

For detailed isolation guidance, visit:

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

- [CDC: Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19 \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html)

CDC recommends longer isolation periods for those with certain medical conditions or those who become severely ill with COVID-19. Visit [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html) for more information.

## Shared housing and isolation

Shared housing in IHE settings is considered a lower risk congregate setting due to lower risk of severe health outcomes (such as hospitalization and death) associated with young adults. Except for certain situations involving those at high risk of severe disease, IHE settings should follow the general population guidance for isolation at home. Visit:

- [If You Are Sick or Test Positive: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html)
- [CDC: Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19 \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html)

The lowest risk option to protect students who share a suite, apartment, or house with others is to isolate a student in an isolation space with a separate bedroom and bathroom if they test positive for COVID-19.

Students at high risk for severe disease should be encouraged to make housing accommodations prior to the start of a term to reduce exposure to COVID-19. Students may choose to apply for an on-campus private room or to secure a private room or residence off campus. Additionally, these students should be provided with information on how to access medication for COVID-19, visit [COVID-19 Medication \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html).

## Recommended services and accommodations for IHE students in isolation

### All students in isolation

- Alternative modes of course instruction and accommodations, such as additional time to complete course work.

### Students in isolation while living on campus

- Access to a phone, meals, and laundry services.
- Supplies, such as a thermometer, masks, sanitizing wipes, tissues, soap, hand sanitizer, toiletries, and medications.
- Contact information for emergencies and for accessing medical resources on campus or in the community, including testing.

## Exposure

A person exposed to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask around others for 10 days and get tested on day six, with day zero being the day of exposure. Persons with a known exposure do not need to stay home unless symptoms develop or the test is positive.

For more detail on what to do when exposed to COVID-19, visit [Close Contact or Exposure to COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html).

## Staff precautions and personal protective equipment for attending to those in isolation

When staff need to enter an isolation room:

The person in isolation should move to a separate space, preferably behind a closed door. If a separate space is not possible:

- The person in isolation should wear a well-fitted, high-quality mask. Visit [Masks: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).
- Staff should avoid close contact with the person in isolation and wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

It is important that the staff person using PPE has received training and is using employer-supplied PPE in the appropriate manner. Staff who correctly wear appropriate PPE are not considered exposed to COVID-19 even if they are close to a person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or longer.

For staff cleaning and disinfecting guidance, including applicable PPE, visit [When and How to Clean and Disinfect Your Facility \(www.cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/facility.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/cleaning/facility.html).

For PPE guidance applicable to staff providing patient care, visit [Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Factsheet \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/A\\_FS\\_HCP\\_COVID19\\_PPE.pdf\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/A_FS_HCP_COVID19_PPE.pdf) and [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html).

## Reporting

### MDH reporting requirements

COVID-19 is a reportable disease in Minnesota. Specific requirements are:

- IHE administrators should report any unusual incidence or increased severity of COVID-19 as is described in the reporting rule. For details, visit [Minnesota Administrative Rules 4605.7050 \(https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4605.7050/\)](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/4605.7050/).
- Additionally, if an outbreak of COVID-19 occurs and IHE staff determine they need public health assistance to manage it, contact MDH IHE staff at: [Health.HigherEd.COVID19@state.mn.us](mailto:Health.HigherEd.COVID19@state.mn.us).

- Campus health services provider reporting: Report cases to [COVID-19 Provider Portal \(redcap-c19.web.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=J3AH4M7W7D\)](https://redcap-c19.web.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=J3AH4M7W7D).
- Laboratories and test sites operating under a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certificate of waiver are required to follow COVID-19 lab reporting requirements. For more information, see [COVID-19 Test Reporting Requirements \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/reportlab.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/reportlab.html).

## Prevention strategies

IHE administrators should create programs and policies that facilitate implementation of prevention strategies for COVID-19. Since IHEs vary in size, complexity, student profile, and degree to which students live on campus or commute, prevention strategies should be tailored to each institution.

Check your county COVID-19 hospital admission level at [CDC: United States COVID-19 Hospitalizations, Deaths, Emergency Department \(ED\) Visits, and Test Positivity by Geographic Area \(https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps\\_new-admissions-rate-county\)](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_new-admissions-rate-county) tool to determine what prevention measures are recommended.

For detailed prevention recommendations, visit:

- [Protect Yourself & Others: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/prevention.html)
- [How to Protect Yourself and Others \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html)

In addition to basic health and hygiene practices, like handwashing, some prevention actions apply at all COVID-19 hospital admission levels.

- **Vaccination:** Vaccination is the leading COVID-19 prevention strategy. For guidance and strategies for increasing access to vaccine, including hosting vaccine clinics, visit [COVID-19 and Your Campus \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihevax.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihevax.html).
- **Consistent and correct mask use:** For when to wear a mask and types of masks for better protection, visit [Masks: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).
- **Testing:** Learn more about when and where to test at [COVID-19 Testing \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/index.html).
- **Isolation:** If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or test positive, stay home and away from others (isolate) and mask when around others. Learn more at [If You are Sick or Test Positive \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/sick.html).
- **Exposure precautions:** If you were exposed to someone who has COVID-19, learn more about the precautions you should take, including how long to wear a mask, at [Close Contact or Exposure to COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/close.html).
- **Medication information for those at high risk of severe disease:** Learn more at [COVID-19 Medication \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/meds.html). You can find information on conditions that place people at higher risk of severe disease, at [CDC: People](https://www.cdc.gov/)

[with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

- **Ventilation:** Maintain improved ventilation throughout indoor spaces when possible, including opening windows and doors. For resources on improving ventilation, visit:
  - [Indoor Air Considerations: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/indoorair.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/indoorair.html)
  - [CDC: Ventilation in Buildings \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html)

## COVID-19 scenario-based prevention strategies

Prevention efforts are informed by the CDC COVID-19 hospital admission levels. Actions listed are considerations only and do not include the complete list of options available. The decision to implement each action will depend on the characteristics of the circulating variant of COVID-19 and the available resources at each institution.

### Scenario 1: Normal Operations

#### Indicators

**COVID-19 hospital admission level is low.**

- Visit [CDC: COVID Data Tracker \(https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps\\_new-admissions-rate-county\)](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_new-admissions-rate-county)

AND

- Campus operations for academics and student life are not impacted by COVID-19 in a meaningful way.

#### Mitigation

Communication

- Establish and make known a point of contact for COVID-19 resources for students, staff, and faculty.

Vaccination

- Promote vaccination.
- Provide vaccine or access to vaccine as needed.

Masks

- Students and staff may choose to wear a mask at any COVID-19 hospital admission level based on personal preferences and considerations, such as their own or others' personal risk factors.
- For more information, refer to [Masks: COVID19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/facecover.html).

## Testing

- Promote self-screening and diagnostic testing.
- Ensure access to testing, including point-of-care and at-home tests.

## Academics and campus life

- Review institution policies, protocols, and communication plans and revise if needed.
- Prepare plans for changes in COVID-19 hospital admission levels or a change in the severity of disease from the circulating SARS-CoV-2 variant.

## Student support services

- Establish and ensure equitable policies for those who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Visit [Health Equity and COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/about/covid19.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/about/covid19.html).
- Communicate with students who are immunocompromised or at high risk of severe disease. Visit [CDC: People with Certain Medical Conditions \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

## Facilities management

- Maintain improved ventilation in public indoor spaces, classrooms, libraries, and other spaces where people gather. Refer to “Ventilation” in the Prevention Strategies section of this document.

## Scenario 2: Modified operations

### Indicators

#### COVID-19 hospital admission level is medium.

- Visit [CDC: COVID Data Tracker \(https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps\\_new-admissions-rate-county\)](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_new-admissions-rate-county).

#### AND

- Campus operations for academics and student life are impacted by COVID-19 and include absenteeism and cancellations.

### Mitigation

#### Scenario 1 measures apply.

#### Communication

- Consistently communicate COVID-19 updates to students, staff, and faculty.

#### Vaccination

- Increase vaccine promotion.
- Host a clinic or expand existing clinics.

### Masks

- People who are immunocompromised or at high risk of severe disease from COVID-19 and those around them should mask in public settings.

### Testing

- Review inventory and increase on-campus testing capacity.
- Distribute over-the-counter antigen test kits as resources allow.

### Academics and campus life

- Ensure that students who are immunocompromised or at high risk of severe disease can move out of residential facilities without penalty and with support for finding alternative housing if needed.
- Offer more to-go meals and limit the dining facility occupancy as necessary.

### Student support services

- Ensure appropriate support for students who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
- Allow for student involvement in choosing accommodations; support different types of accommodations (e.g., technological support, food security).

### Athletics and extracurricular programs

- Reduce extracurricular in-person attendance and meeting frequency.
- Reduce the number of spectators at events.

### Facilities management

- Modify or limit facility use, especially where students gather.

## Scenario 3: Surge Operations

### Indicators

#### COVID-19 hospital admission level is high.

- Visit [CDC: COVID Data Tracker \(https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps\\_new-admissions-rate-county\)](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#maps_new-admissions-rate-county).

AND either, or both:

- Campus operations for academics and student life are significantly impacted by COVID-19 and include extensive absenteeism and cancellations.

And/or

- There is transmission of a new variant of concern with higher disease severity.

## Mitigation

### Scenario 2 measures apply.

#### Communication

- Communicate transitions to hybrid or all online instruction, as applicable.

#### Masks

- Require institution-wide masking in public settings.

#### Vaccination

- Offer vaccine as resources allow.

#### Academics and student life

- Implement hybrid or all online instruction.
- Restrict outside access to dorms and residence halls.
- If possible, work with off-campus housing owners and staff to consider limits to visitation.

#### Athletics and extracurricular programs

- Move to virtual options or individual-only development and exercise for athletes.

#### Facilities management

- Postpone or cancel events, including third-party events.

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*To obtain this information in a different format, contact: 651-201-5414.*