

# Recommendations for Different Levels of COVID-19 Transmission Among Higher Education Institutions

Updates to the document since Aug. 14, 2020, include clarification of a link to a file that shows the 14-day COVID-19 case rate by Minnesota county, the addition of color coding to the transmission levels, and new action steps in the general recommendations under Scenario 3.

## How to use this document

This guidance document is meant to be used in coordination with the [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf) and other guidance documents found at [Institutes of Higher Education \(IHE\): COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html).

This document is organized into sections by scenarios based on levels of disease incidence occurring in or around a campus. Many campuses are using corresponding color codes to indicate their current scenario/transmission level, so those are referenced in this document. The recommended actions are meant to help minimize opportunities for transmission of COVID-19 for students, staff, and faculty. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Office of Higher Education (OHE) recognize there are diverse learning environments that will require teams to use thoughtful strategies when applying guidance to meet the health and safety needs of all students, faculty, and staff.

Not all recommended actions will be possible in all settings, and therefore should be tailored as appropriate. This planning document includes sections addressing:

- General recommendations.
- Screening for symptoms and testing.
- Leadership and communication.
- Academic programming.
- Residence life and dining.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Student support services.
- Employee support services.
- Information technology.
- Athletics and recreational programs.
- Campus operations and maintenance.
- Campus security.
- Community engagement and support.
- Third-party use of facilities, events, and rentals.

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## Assumptions

- MDH and local public health (LPH) will work with institutes of higher education to respond to cluster or outbreak situations; as such, MDH and LPH will also partner with higher education on how to increase mitigation efforts as disease outbreaks occur.
- The scenarios should be considered as “stackable,” meaning that Scenario 2 should include Scenario 1’s activities.
- IHE should develop methods to monitor the level of COVID-19 activity among students, faculty, and staff. Campuses that need help with this should reach out to their MDH or LPH contact.
- All recommendations apply to both residential and non-residential campuses unless otherwise indicated.
- Higher education institutions will follow direction and recommendations for responding to a surge or outbreak of COVID-19 offered by MDH, LPH, and other government officials.
- Due to sizes of student bodies and campus communities, different institutions may have different capacities to handle an increase in cases, thus the recommendations they put in place to respond may vary.

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## Development of this document

This document was created using the following resources and in collaboration with partners in higher education, including guidance from the MDH IHE Surge Capacity Workgroup. Transmission risk level thresholds were created based on current MDH higher education and K-12 guidance, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, MDH and IHE workgroups, and EAB (formerly the Education Advisory Board) threshold indicators:

- [Institutes of Higher Education \(IHE\): COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/ihe.html)
- [2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools: Health Considerations for Navigating COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/k12planguide.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/k12planguide.pdf)

- [CDC: Interim Guidance for Administrators of U.S. Institutions of Higher Education \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html)
- [EAB: How will we know that an outbreak on campus has become uncontainable? \(eab.com/insights/expert-insight/academic-affairs/when-an-outbreak-on-campus-has-become-uncontainable/\)](https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/academic-affairs/when-an-outbreak-on-campus-has-become-uncontainable/)

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## Transmission level indicator decision points

Level of risk of transmission is associated with the likelihood of viral spread or outbreak. The next section provides a list of strategies to consider implementing depending on the risk level of transmission on campus. Institutes of higher education can use these scenarios as they navigate activity this fall and to determine applicable conditions when students return to campus.

**The COVID-19 Weekly Report with number of infections and the K-12 14-day COVID-19 Case Rate referenced in each scenario can be found in:**

- [COVID-19 Weekly Report \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stats/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stats/index.html) “Weekly Case Rate by County of Residence” and “Weekly Percent of Tests Positive By County of Residence” slides.
- [Data for K-12 Schools: 14-day COVID-19 Case Rate by County \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stats/wschooll.pdf\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/stats/wschooll.pdf)

### Scenario 1 – Indicators for low transmission levels (green)

**Transmission levels seen as manageable by the individual institution.**

- Cases of COVID-19 on the campus are manageable by the IHE.
- Contacts are able to be identified at the time of case interview.
- Isolation and quarantine rooms are less than 50% full.
- K-12 indicators show less than 10 per 10,000 cases over a 14-day period in the relevant county or counties. In some cases, colleges/universities may look at neighboring counties, especially if the IHE sits on or near the border of two counties.

### Scenario 2 – Indicators for medium transmission levels (yellow)

**Transmission levels are beginning to tax campus resources.**

If two or more of the following indicators are met, strongly consider implementing mitigation efforts suggested in Scenario 2 action items below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Number of infections are increasing over a seven-day period in the county. See “Weekly Case Rate by County of Residence” and “Weekly Percent of Tests Positive By County of Residence” slides.
- Cases reported among those students who are routinely on campus comprise more than 1% of students over a 14-day period.
  - Should also consider the setting where cases are being reported when using this indicator. Is it mostly in-campus housing, off-campus housing?
- More than 5% of campus cases have unknown links to another case over a seven-day period. MDH or LPH can work with campus officials to help track this as well.
- 50-75% of campus isolation and quarantine beds are full.
- Routine testing capacity (whether through on-site clinics, contracted labs, or other sources) is starting to be a concern, and regular routes of testing are being depleted or tests are taking longer than 24-48 hours to result.
- Less than a 10-day supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) is available for the campus.
- Other internal metrics are showing concerning signs, for example, increased absenteeism among faculty or staff.
- K-12 indicators show that there are 10-30 cases per 10,000 over a 14-day period in the relevant county or counties.

### **Scenario 3 – Indicators for high transmission levels (orange)**

#### **Transmission levels have further depleted or exhausted institutional resources.**

Increased case activity may be occurring on campus, in the community, or both. If two or more of the following indicators are met, strongly consider implementing mitigation efforts suggested in Scenario 3.

- Number of infections continue to increase over the two weeks after Scenario 2 mitigation efforts have been put into place.
- Cases reported among those students who are routinely on campus comprise more than 3% of students over a 14-day period.
- Consider where spread is occurring when using this indicator. Is it mostly on-campus housing or off-campus housing?
- More than 75% of isolation and quarantine beds are full.
- Students and staff are not complying with public health mitigation recommendations, such as masking, social distancing, and avoiding social gatherings.
- Other internal metrics of capacity and staffing suggest a more aggressive approach to mitigation.
- K-12 indicators show that there are more than 30 cases per 10,000 over a 14-day period in the relevant county or counties.

## Scenario 4 – Sustained high risk indicators (red)

**Transmission levels have seriously depleted or exhausted institutional resources.**

The above mitigation efforts do not show an improvement over a two-week period after Scenario 3 has been put in place.

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## Action items in response to scenarios

### Scenario 1 – Low level of transmission (green)

Transmission levels are not taxing the institution's resources. The assumption is that many of these recommendations will already have been implemented prior to students returning to campus and per the recommendations found at [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf).

#### General recommendations

- Have plans in place that follow the [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf).
- Ensure that information technology inventory can support students, staff, and faculty learning or working remotely.

#### Leadership and communication

- Activate a communications plan for all faculty, staff, and students about what behaviors are expected in the fall to help mitigate further spread of the virus. Use the institution's main communications channels to disseminate as broadly as possible.
- Update and institute recommended MDH protocols for social distancing.
- Stand ready to provide training for use of education and communication platforms.
- Assign leader(s) to each of the following to ensure clear communication and direction:
  - Enforcement of policies, including social distancing, masking, and any code of conduct policies that may be applicable at a given institution relating to willful violations.
  - Team leads or groups to reinforce notions of ethical and moral responsibility for self and others in the institutional community.
  - Liaisons with local public health and other local officials as needed.

#### Academic programming

- Follow MDH IHE guidance and reduce class sizes to conform to social distancing standards. Remove tables and chairs in accordance with ADA standards and in keeping with any expressed accessibility issues.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Consider flexible and staggered scheduling of courses.
- Re-examine available resources to support a wide range of teaching strategies and scenarios (e.g., hybrid/blended learning, fully online, in-person with distancing, students connecting virtually, faculty teaching remotely).

### Residence life and dining

- Follow MDH IHE Guidance.
- Develop a communications plan for all students (on- and off-campus), that contains:
  - A list of available resources.
  - MDH protocols for household living.
  - Public transport options.

### Employee support services

- Ensure there is a designated human resources contact list for employees to call with questions or concerns.
- Communicate the institution's available employee assistance program (EAP) options.

### Campus security

- Reduce points of entry to buildings.
- Communicate safety plans to campus communities. Regardless of the level of surge severity, regular communications are encouraged with all stakeholders that point to posted information about plans and solicits feedback.
- Reassess the use of facilities for events or rentals using recommended guidelines from local, state, federal governments, and university or college policies and procedures.

## Scenario 2 – Medium level of transmission (yellow)

**Transmission levels are taxing campus resources. All prior recommendations apply, with the following additional recommendations. Review all managed outbreak actions and then proceed.**

### General recommendations

- Reinforce health etiquette expectations.
- Communicate expectations to students, faculty, and staff both on and off campus.
- Cancel events and activities that bring groups of students together when social distancing cannot be easily maintained; consider limiting social and activity gatherings to 10 indoors and 10 outdoors.
- Reach out to LPH and MDH for testing support.
- Reach out to LPH, regional health care organizations, and MDH for PPE support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Monitor and maintain proper inventories of critical supplies (e.g., cleaning and disinfectant agents, hand sanitizers, PPE-related supplies).
- Consider imposing a campus curfew.
- Establish relationships with city and county officials in case broader mitigation efforts are needed that would require support and buy-in from local officials and leadership.

### Screening for symptoms and testing

- Find innovative ways to remind students to look for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Promote the importance of self-screening.
- In collaboration with MDH or LPH, consider broad testing for areas where there are clusters on campus (dorms, activities, etc.). Further considerations can be found in the testing section of the [Guidance for Mitigating COVID-19 at Higher Education Institutions \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/guideihe.pdf).

### Leadership and communication

- Provide messaging via the campus website, social media, and emails to campus constituents with concerns and needs to better adhere to guidelines as well as restrictions as noted above.
- Consider extra communication and precautions for people who are considered high risk for severe illness.
- Ensure all communications with stakeholders (students, staff, faculty, and surrounding community) are current and the messages conveyed are uniformly delivered to ensure that everyone is informed.
- Adjust operations in human resources, facilities, finance, academics, etc., to account for shifts in services and demand with increased number of cases.
- Communicate and reiterate recommendations for staff, faculty, and students who feel sick to stay home.

### Academic programming

- Professors should be prepared to continue teaching students who are in quarantine or isolation, and ensure academic continuity for students at any point in the semester.
- Modify courses where students are not able to social distance.
  - Example: for lab classes, find ways to reduce the need for activities that need partners.

### Residence life and dining

- Move to more to-go options on campus and consider a curbside pickup option for meals.
- Ensure that social distancing expectations can be strictly enforced in dining rooms.
  - In some cases, leaving dining open but restricting flow and seating will be more effective than students going elsewhere and gathering.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Work with MDH or LPH to consider initiating options for extra capacity for quarantine and isolation.
  - Decisions to raise capacity should be guided by local, state, and federal recommended guidelines. Each institution's ability to raise capacity is unique; confer with your designated leadership group for guidance.

### **Athletics and recreational programs**

- Consider canceling or delaying athletic and recreational events, including intra-team practices, scrimmages and/or games that cannot maintain social distancing standards.

### **Campus operations and maintenance**

- Consider modifying or limiting hours of operation (especially for areas where students tend to gather or cluster).
- Continue to monitor and enforce recommended MDH guidelines for social distancing.
- Ensure that enforcement strictly adheres with an institution's policies and procedures.

### **Community engagement and support**

- Communicate safety plans to campus communities. Regardless of the level of surge severity, regular communications to all stakeholders that point to available information about plans and solicit feedback are encouraged.

### **Third-party use of facilities, events, and rentals**

- Consider canceling or reducing events and rentals.

## **Scenario 3 – High level of transmission (orange)**

**Transmission levels have seriously depleted or exhausted institutional resources. All prior recommendations apply with these additions.**

### **General recommendations**

- Cancel all extracurricular activities for at least two weeks.
- Consider canceling all in-person classes for two weeks, or cancel in-person classes for one week and then allow classes that can maintain 6-foot social distancing back in session only if improvement is seen in student and staff buy-in to social distancing, wearing face coverings, and other related behaviors.
- Reach out to LPH and MDH for testing support.
- Reach out to LPH and MDH for PPE support.
- Monitor and maintain proper inventories of critical supplies (e.g., cleaning and disinfectant agents, hand sanitizers, PPE related supplies).
- Impose a campus curfew.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- Begin working with city and county officials for other community wide approaches to mitigate transmission.

### **Leadership and communication**

- Ensure regular update on status.
- Review plans to cease in-person classes if Scenario 4 must be activated.
- Hold virtual town hall meetings with campus community.
- Plan social media outreach, monitoring, and response.

### **Academic programming**

- Move classes that cannot adhere to 6-foot social distancing to online only.

### **Residence life and dining**

- Restrict outside access to dorms and residence halls.
- Work with off-campus housing to consider limiting visitation.
- Consider allowing some students to move home to virtual learning and reduce number of students to one person per room in a residential facility.
- Continue to promote grab-and-go options for dining.
  - Keep dining halls open so students do not gather elsewhere, but reduce the number of people that can sit at a table to two.
  - Ensure social distancing of 6 feet or greater in all other arrangements.

### **Student support services**

- Move student support services to virtual/digital format (e.g., telemental health).
- Consider how to support students who already experience racial disparities; COVID-19 is exacerbating those disparities.

### **Employee support services**

- Share EAP contacts, mental health services, and retirement planning services.

### **Information technology**

- Ensure access to loanable computers, including desktops, laptops, tablets, Chromebooks, etc.
- Ensure remote access to computer labs.
- Check availability of Wi-Fi hotspots.
- Have local ISP providers for student access.
- Make troubleshooting guides available for student internet connectivity issues.
- Create a support plan for issues that may occur as faculty and staff work from home.

### **Athletics and recreational programs**

- Move to individual development only for all athletics.
- Close weight rooms.
- Allow only activities that can be done while wearing face coverings in a gym or fitness facility.

### **Campus operations and maintenance**

- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfecting on campus.

### **Campus security**

- Ensure access to campus is restricted to essential personnel.
- Lock and secure access points.
- Patrol access points and interior facilities.

### **Community engagement and support**

- Communicate pandemic plan and lock-down procedures in place.
- Consider if and how college or university facilities and other resources could be made available for pandemic response actions.

### **Third-party use of facilities, events, and rentals**

- Consider canceling all third-party events and refund deposits, to the extent possible.

### **Plan for next phase if numbers do not decrease**

- Temporarily empty or reduce the number of residents in residence halls.
- Plan for housing for students who do not have another place to live.

## **Scenario 4 – Sustained level of high transmission (red)**

### **Transmission levels have exhausted institutional resources.**

The above mitigation efforts have not resulted in an improvement over a two to three-week period after Scenario 3 has been put in place. Campus should move to online only until the next semester or after break.

## Resources

### General

- [ACHA Guidelines: Consideration for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era \(www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA\\_Considerations\\_for\\_Reopening\\_IHEs\\_in\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_Era\\_May2020.pdf\)](http://www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_in_the_COVID-19_Era_May2020.pdf)
- [CDC: Interim Guidance for Administrators of U.S. Institutions of Higher Education \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/guidance-administrators-college-higher-education.pdf\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/guidance-administrators-college-higher-education.pdf)
- [State of Connecticut: Governor Lamont Receives Recommendations for a Phased Reopening of Colleges and Universities in Connecticut \(portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/05-2020/Governor-Lamont-Receives-Recommendations-for-a-Phased-Reopening-of-Colleges-and-Universities\)](http://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/05-2020/Governor-Lamont-Receives-Recommendations-for-a-Phased-Reopening-of-Colleges-and-Universities)
- [Inside Higher Ed: Fall Scenario #13: A HyFlex Model \(www.insidehighered.com/print/blogs/learning-innovation/fall-scenario-13-hyflex-model\)](http://www.insidehighered.com/print/blogs/learning-innovation/fall-scenario-13-hyflex-model)
- [Minnesota COVID-19 Response: Is It COVID-19? \(mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/if-sick/is-it-covid/\)](http://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/if-sick/is-it-covid/)
- [CDC: Caring for Someone Sick at Home \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html)

### Signage

- [CDC: COVID-19 Print Resources \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc)

### Campus recreation

- [NIRSA: Coronavirus Updates and Resources for Campus Recreation \(nirsa.net/nirsa/covid19/\)](http://nirsa.net/nirsa/covid19/)

### Housing

- [CDC: Clinical Questions About COVID-19: Questions and Answers \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html)
- [ACUHO-I: COVID-19 \(Novel Coronavirus\) Resources \(www.acuho-i.org/covid19\)](http://www.acuho-i.org/covid19)
- [CDC: Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html)

### Mental health support

- [HEMHA College Counseling from a Distance: Deciding Whether and When to Engage in Telemental Health Services \(hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HEMHA-Distance-Counseling\\_FINAL2019.pdf\)](http://hemha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HEMHA-Distance-Counseling_FINAL2019.pdf)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION  
AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- [American Counseling Association: Counseling in a Time of COVID-19  
\(www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/trauma-disaster/mental-health-professional-counseling-and-emergency-preparedness\)](https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/trauma-disaster/mental-health-professional-counseling-and-emergency-preparedness)
- [SAMHSA: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus)
- [Mental Health America: Mental Health and COVID-19 Information and Resources  
\(mhanational.org/covid19#ForMentalHealthProviders\)](https://mhanational.org/covid19#ForMentalHealthProviders)



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