

UW-Madison: Shifts to two weeks of remote instruction, quarantines two residence halls

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Chancellor Rebecca Blank sent the following message to students, faculty and staff this evening:

To our UW-Madison community,

UW-Madison has taken extraordinary measures to prioritize the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff while facilitating some form of in-person activity this fall. We partnered with public health experts to develop a method of testing, isolating and managing COVID-19.

As the number of positive test results has increased during the last two weeks, we have taken several additional actions. On Monday we restricted undergraduates to essential activities only. We worked with public health authorities to support the quarantine of students living in many fraternity and sorority houses and we mandated testing for live-in members of all fraternity and sorority chapters.

Unfortunately, our positive test rate among students continues to rise far too rapidly. It has been 20 percent or greater for the past two days. As we saw at the end of last week, these numbers reflect a rapid rise in infection among students living off campus, but the latest numbers also show a sharp increase in certain residence halls. We will not contain this spread without significant additional action. In consultation with UW System Administration, Public Health Madison & Dane County and Governor Evers, we are taking the following actions:

- All in-person undergraduate, graduate and professional school group instruction

will be paused from Sept. 10 – 25. These classes will be cancelled Thursday, Sept. 10 – Saturday, Sept. 12 and will resume remotely beginning Monday, Sept. 14 for at least two weeks. Clinical training will be permitted to continue. Classes and sections that are currently being offered remotely will continue as scheduled. Our contact tracing has not revealed any evidence of transmission from in-person instruction; however, this decision comes out of an abundance of caution for our students and employees. The Office of the Provost will provide assistance, if needed, to faculty and instructional staff making this quick transition to remote learning.

- Undergraduate research experiences that can be accomplished remotely must be conducted that way starting September 10 and continuing until September 25. The suspension of undergraduate students participating in face-to-face human subject research interactions, on and off campus, remains in effect until September 25. Graduate and post-doctoral research activities will be permitted to continue.
- Given the high number of positive test results in Sellery and Witte Residence Halls, we have directed all residents in these buildings to quarantine in place for the next two weeks effective at 10 p.m. this evening. All residents of these halls who have not already been tested this week will be required to test on Thursday and Friday. University Health Services (UHS) will conduct these tests on-site.
- Students are NOT being asked to move out of the residence halls or leave town. We have significant additional quarantine space available if necessary.
- Appointments continue to be available for on-campus testing; we are also working to further expand testing capacity.

In addition, the following changes will be made to our campus operations, effective Sept. 10 – 25:

- All in-person study spaces, including those at University Libraries, the Wisconsin Union and academic buildings will be closed.
- Dining services will shift to carry-out only for Housing residents and staff. The Wisconsin Union will provide curbside food pickup only.
- University Recreation & Wellbeing facilities will be closed.
- University Health Services will only be open for urgent care needs, by appointment

only. Telehealth and telemedicine appointments are available.

- University Libraries will revert to their summertime operations, supporting the research mission of the university.
- In-person gatherings, including all social events and work gatherings of more than 10 people, are cancelled. Employees may meet in groups of 10 or fewer for essential purposes. Whenever possible, work meetings should continue to be conducted remotely via phone or video streaming.

On-site essential operations will continue, as they have done throughout this pandemic. Employees working remotely should continue to do so. Supervisors should be flexible with employees who have returned to work on campus in non-essential functions.

I am thankful for the employees who continue to work on-site and keep our campus running. No changes will be made to Madison Metro bus schedules or campus parking operations at this time. Facility access and mail and package delivery will remain the same. Child care centers will remain open at this time.

These measures follow the precedent set by several other universities that have paused in-person instruction for two weeks in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. We will continue to consult with UW System and our Board of Regents as we evaluate the situation and share more information about the rest of the semester. We remain committed to communicating our evolving plans as quickly and transparently as possible.

CDC guidance suggests that students should not travel home during this two-week period. This is to protect you, your family, and the community. If you can stay where you are, that is the safest course. If you do choose to travel, please follow these guidelines (<https://smartrestart.wisc.edu/information-for-residence-halls-under-quarantine/>) from University Health Services.

I share the disappointment and frustration of students and employees who had hoped we might enjoy these first few weeks of the academic year together. Before we started this semester, we knew that no plan would be risk-free in the current environment.

To those of you who have been following our campus-wide health protocols, I thank

you for your awareness and dedication to protecting our UW-Madison community. Please continue to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19: monitor your symptoms daily, use a face covering, practice physical distancing, and limit gatherings. To those of you who have not yet taken these protocols seriously, I urge you to consider the consequences of your actions. Your behavior matters, and it has the potential to impact more than just your immediate circles as we are seeing with the recent growth in positive cases.

We care about your safety and well-being. Please take care of yourself and others during this time. If you have questions, email smartrestart@vc.wisc.edu.

Chancellor Rebecca Blank