

Campus Update

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on behalf of

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It has been a number of days since my last update to the campus regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope that your semester activities are going as well as can be expected in this changing environment.

Over the past week, I have responded to a few questions related to the status of our buildings and whether we have seen additional cases of COVID-19 in our community. I have also been asked to provide guidance for situations regarding who would be considered to be a close contact to someone who is being tested for, or found to be, positive for the illness. Given that, I feel it is important that I share this information with the broader community so that we are all aware of the processes involved.

The response to each of the positive cases as this pandemic progresses is being managed by the public health infrastructure of the state of North Dakota. The process they use back-traces contacts to those positive COVID-19 individuals based on interviews of the person who tested positive, going backwards to identify the contacts of that individual who were considered to be epidemiologically close.

The process has been described as follows: when the Health Department is notified of a positive test by the testing laboratory, they notify the provider that sampled the patient who then notifies the patient of the positive test. The Health Department, after waiting a sufficient amount of time for that contact to occur, ~30 minutes, will also contact the patient to start the epidemiological contact tracing. They will inform the patient of the required isolation steps they are to place themselves under, and then begin investigating possible contacts. Following established criteria for this virus, they will ask the patient where they traveled and who they were near/around in the recent past. When the patient shares this data, they will dig in to find out more specifics, i.e., how close they were to the other individuals or groups of people and for what duration. The criteria they are using to consider contacts as 'close' is 10-15 minutes and within 12' distance—they are doubling the 6' social distance guidance in the investigation phase to add a margin for error. Anyone who falls within those criteria are then notified that they have come into close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and informed of their duty to quarantine themselves for 14 days, monitoring their symptoms, and if necessary, getting connected with a medical provider should they start to experience symptoms of the disease.

As an aid to understanding closeness of contact to those being tested or found positive, I have found this graphic helpful from the Fargo Cass Public Health's website:

https://download.fargond.gov/resize/1920/1080/0/covid-19_exposure_tool.png

As described above, the way the epidemiology science works is that the public health officials, through their investigations, determine who it is that needs to be contacted. They are then also the people who actually make the contact with those identified individuals. While this contact tracing provides the official method of notification for affected individuals, I also feel **it is extremely important that all of us understand that the Cass County area is considered to be a location where community spread is occurring. I would encourage everyone to take the risk of both person to person and non-person exposure seriously. You can best protect yourself from both of these sources if you continue the social distancing practices that have been suggested since the time the virus was first detected in this state.** To reiterate:

- Put distance between yourself and other people, at least 6ft
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Stay home as much as possible
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and immediately wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others, if unable to maintain necessary distance

From what I understand, the state is still able to keep up with the contact tracing given the current relatively low level of additional daily positive cases. Continuing this contact tracing is important, because it has been listed by the Governor and others as an important component of the state and nation's ability to start getting back to a more normal state.

We are beginning to see a few instances of those who contracted the illness early on returning to good health and returning to the campus if they are not able to work remotely. Know that these individuals have been cleared through the public health processes and, on a positive note, it is likely they possess a certain level of immunity to the disease.

Looking forward, we still have some decisions to make regarding some summer activities that as of yet have not had their schedules adjusted. We hope to be able to do that in the very near future. Conversations have begun regarding the timing and proper transition back from our remote work operational status. As for this fall, we fully intend to be back to in-person instruction for Fall 2020 and remain ready to adjust should the need arise.

Thank you for all of your efforts as we work through the challenges presented by the pandemic. As always, if you have specific questions, please let me know.

Take care,

Mike

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