



# Interim Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (UPDATED: March 19, 2020)

Governor Cooper has implemented a phased approach to slowly lift restrictions while combatting COVID-19, protecting North Carolinians and working together to recover the economy.

Institutions of higher education, such as Colleges, Community Colleges, and Universities, should follow the guidelines below, adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [Considerations for Institutions of Higher Education](#), to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Guidelines for Institutions of Higher Education:** Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. All institutions of higher education where groups of people gather in an enclosed space should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission on their campuses. The guidance below will help institutions of higher education, including colleges, universities, and community colleges, reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities. The updated guidance below reflects lessons learned that viral spread is originating in communal living settings on and off campus, social gatherings on and off campus and with athletic teams.

## **This guidance covers the following topics:**

- Off Campus Housing and Gatherings
- Cloth Face Coverings
- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
- Group Gatherings and Activities
- Shared or Congregate Housing
- Classrooms and Learning Environments
- Monitoring for Symptoms
- Protecting Vulnerable Populations
- Cleaning and Hygiene
- Communications and Combatting Misinformation
- Water and Ventilation Systems
- Transportation
- Surveillance and Screening Testing
- Additional Resources

## **Off Campus Housing and Gatherings**

In addition to their on-campus activities, all institutions of higher education must develop detailed strategies, enforcement options in coordination with local law enforcement and campus police, and

communication plans to address students living and spending time in off campus settings. These settings include off campus housing whether apartments, houses, or sorority/fraternity houses. All gatherings are subject to current mass gathering limits as outlined in current [Executive Orders](#). Additionally, all students, faculty and staff are required to wear a face covering in public settings in accordance with the Executive Order.

It is recommended that **institutions of higher education:**

- Set student expectations and message that students in violation of Executive Orders will be held accountable for off campus behavior given the high risk of viral transmission among students. Implement university disciplinary actions for failure to comply with face covering and social gathering requirements.
- Have other shared housing settings follow Shared or Congregate Housing Considerations outlined below.
- Ensure that events, parties, and gatherings adhere to mass gathering limits and follow recommendations for group gatherings and activities.
- Have campus police coordinate with local law enforcement to ensure mass gathering limits are enforced and large gatherings among students living off campus are avoided.
- Have social clubs pledge support to institutions' COVID-19 policies, rules, and control measures.

### Cloth Face Coverings

There is growing evidence that wearing a [face covering](#) can help reduce the spread of COVID-19, especially because people may be infected with the virus and not know it.

It is **required** that institutions of higher education:

- All students, faculty and staff wear a cloth face covering when they may be near (less than 6 feet from) other people, unless they have a medical or behavioral health contraindication.

It is **recommended** that institutions of higher education:

- Provide cloth face coverings for students, faculty and staff and ask them to properly launder using hot water and dried on highest temperature setting between uses.
- Visit the NC DHHS [COVID-19 response site](#) for more information about face coverings and access sign templates that are available in English and Spanish.

### Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure

[Social distancing](#) is one of the few tools we currently have to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people; do not gather in groups; stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

It is **recommended** that institutions of higher education:

- Reduce density in congregate living settings by limiting on campus housing.
- Minimize opportunities for close contact, by limiting sustained exposure (15 minutes or more) or when sharing space by ensuring sufficient social distancing with at least 6 feet between people whenever possible (e.g., adequate space exists in hallways or communal areas, classrooms are large enough or class sizes are small enough, students and staff are in large outdoor spaces).

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- Provide [signage](#) and frequent reminders for students, faculty and staff to stay at least 6 feet apart from one another when feasible.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls to ensure that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart in lines, while using elevators and stairways and at other times.
- Provide signage that designates specific doors for entrance and exits when feasible.
- Space seating/desks at least 6 feet apart when feasible. For lecture halls, consider taping off seats and rows to ensure six-foot distance between seats.
- Provide 6 feet distance between individuals engaged in experiential learning opportunities (e.g., labs, vocational skill building activities) and on transportation vehicles (e.g., skipping rows, in addition to ventilation) when possible.
- Place physical barriers such as plexiglass for protection in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart (e.g., reception desks, cash registers).
- Close shared and communal spaces such as dining halls, game rooms, exercise rooms and lounges if possible; otherwise, stagger use and restrict the number of people allowed in at one time to ensure everyone can stay at least 6 feet apart, and clean and disinfect between use.
- Offer distance learning in addition to in-person classes to help reduce the number of in-person attendees. Prepare, train, and support faculty to convert their in-person classes to remote.
- Provide student support services virtually, as feasible.
- Follow CDC's guidance for [Shared or Congregate Housing](#) for communal spaces in student or faculty housing (e.g., laundry rooms, shared bathrooms and recreation areas).

### Group Gatherings and Activities

Gatherings and activities, including clubs, fraternity/sorority events, and athletics are a routine part of student, staff, and faculty life at institutions of higher education. Gatherings of groups pose a risk for COVID-19 transmission and measures should be considered to limit the risk of transmission.

#### **It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- Limit all social events, gatherings, and meetings to current mass gathering limits and promote social distancing of at least 6 feet between people.
- Establish written requirements and accountability for students participating in Fraternity and Sororities, Social Clubs, Societies, Affinity Group Housing, and other organized groups to limit social events, gatherings and meetings on and off campus and require adherence to the current mass gathering limits and promote social distance of at least 6 feet between people.
- Pursue virtual group events, gatherings, or meetings, if possible.
- Include student leadership and student groups in COVID-19 planning and implementation to increase awareness of mitigation measures and the extent of COVID-19 messaging among student groups.
- Follow the recommendations outlined in [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Participants of Youth, College & Amateur Sports Programs](#).
- Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as possible – especially with individuals who are not from the local geographic area (e.g., community, town, city, or county).

### Shared or Congregate Housing

#### **It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

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- Reduce density in congregate living settings by limiting on campus housing.
- Develop a plan for move in to maximize physical distancing and decrease congregating in common spaces. Stagger move-in times to allow for more free space in common areas. Consider using online dorm check-in methods or other advanced procedures to avoid long lines during move in.
- Close shared and communal spaces such as game rooms and lounges if possible; otherwise, stagger use and restrict the number of people allowed in at one time to ensure everyone can stay at least 6 feet apart, and clean and disinfect between use.
- Limit non-essential visitors or outside volunteers entering congregate housing and maintain a log of visitors to assist with contact tracing in the event of a positive case.
- Provide additional supply of cleaning and disinfecting supplies to be used in dorm rooms, common restrooms, and other common areas in housing. Provide instructions on how students can clean and disinfect areas.
- Encourage windows and doors to remain open when possible to allow for increased air flow.
- Residents should be instructed that shared sinks and countertop spaces in shared bathrooms could be an infection source. Post signs advising students to keep toothbrushes and other personal care items in containers, and do not place directly on counter surfaces. Totes could also be used for personal items to limit their contact with other surfaces in the bathroom.
- Close communal areas, such as kitchens or laundry rooms, or limit the number of people in an area to ensure 6 feet social distancing.
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, or eating utensils.
- Shared bathrooms should be cleaned regularly using EPA-registered disinfectants at least twice per day (e.g., in the morning and evening or after times of heavy use).
- Make sure bathrooms are continuously stocked with soap and paper towels or automated hand dryers. Hand sanitizer could also be made available.
- Make sure trash cans are emptied regularly.
- Provide information on how to wash hands properly. Hang signs in bathrooms.

### Classrooms, Laboratories and Learning Environments

**It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- Implement remote or other learning options for students as needed to accommodate dormitory density reductions.
- Space seating/desks at least 6 feet apart when feasible. For lecture halls, consider taping off seats and rows to ensure six-foot distance between seats.
- Provide 6 feet distance between individuals engaged in experiential learning opportunities (e.g., labs, vocational skill building activities) and on transportation vehicles (e.g., skipping rows, in addition to ventilation) when possible.
- Place physical barriers such as plexiglass for protection in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart (e.g., reception desks, cash registers).
- Limit classroom activities that require groups or partners such as labs or other group projects where students will gather and work closely for long periods. If necessary to have such activities, consider cohorting and requiring the same partners or groups to reduce close exposure to multiple people.
- Consider holding individual office hours or virtual study groups instead of group office hours held in small offices. When students must meet in-person with faculty or other advisers, utilize 6 feet separation or plexiglass barriers/screens and other methods.

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- Consider staggering class times to minimize crowding in hallways or areas entering and exiting classroom when feasible.
- Provide cleaning and disinfecting supplies and instructions for classrooms between classes. Provide a detailed plan on who is responsible for cleaning desk or learning environment areas and provide adequate contact time for chemicals to be effective between classrooms.
- Consider requiring regular or assigned seating assignments to minimize exposure and assist with contact tracing in the event of a positive case.
- Provide clear instruction on how to use cleaning and disinfecting chemicals in laboratory areas. Ensure there is not mixing of cleaning and disinfecting chemicals with other laboratory supplies or other chemicals to avoid dangerous chemical reaction.
- Develop specialized plans for classes that require close contact and/or physical distancing is not possible.
- Clean reusable cloth materials used in classes, such as lab coats, physical education supplies, or other items between users, using approved laundering practices and dried on highest temperature setting for the fabric.

### Dining Services and Shared Restrooms

**It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- Close communal dining rooms. When dining rooms and cafeterias cannot be closed, then it is required that they operate under the capacity and social distancing requirements for restaurants as per the current executive order and provide disinfection supplies and instructions for students to clean area before and/or after using.
- Provide grab-and-go options for meals. If a cafeteria or group dining room is typically used, if possible, serve individually plated meals (versus buffet or any self-serve stations).
- Use disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes). If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.
- Have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee when offering food at an event. Do not offer a buffet or family-style meal. Avoid sharing food and utensils and consider the safety of individuals with food allergies.
- Increase outdoor options for dining seating when feasible.
- Set up handwashing stations when feasible at the entrance of dining areas. When handwashing stations are not available, ensure hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol is available at all entrances.
- Switch to individual packaged condiment containers to reduce shared condiment stations.
- Clearly designate specific stalls, sinks, and other areas in shared restrooms to promote social distancing. Consider posting occupancy limits for large shared restroom facilities.
- Provide additional paper towels or other methods to assist with entering and exiting multi-stall restrooms without touching door handles when possible.

### Monitoring for Symptoms

Conducting regular screening for symptoms can help reduce exposure to COVID-19. Students, faculty and staff should be encouraged to self-monitor for symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath and be aware that a person can become infectious before they become ill, or without becoming ill. If they develop symptoms, students, faculty and staff should [self-isolate](#). More information on [how to monitor for symptoms](#) is available from the CDC.

**It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- ❑ Immediately separate students, faculty or staff who have symptoms from others when they arrive on campus or develop symptoms while on campus.
- ❑ Develop a plan to safely isolate anyone who has COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 and quarantine anyone who has had close contact. Students who have COVID-19 or are exposed should quarantine/isolate in place and not leave the campus area. The plan should:
  - Identify and provide areas for isolation or quarantine (e.g. isolation or quarantine room, area or building/floor for on-campus housing) to isolate anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive but does not have symptoms or to quarantine anyone who has had close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
  - Ensure students, staff, and faculty have a place they can isolate or quarantine effectively if they have off-campus housing.
  - Provide services needed for support (e.g., food and other basic necessities, academic materials, study aids, mental health support, clothing, electronic equipment, medications, laundry, trash pick-up, and food delivery) to ensure the individual can successfully isolate or quarantine for the required amount of time whether in on-campus or off-campus housing.
  - Make every effort to arrange for a brief and safe daily outside/exercise time for quarantined students. This should be set up so as not to expose non-quarantined people or others also in quarantine.
  - Transport an ill student, faculty or staff member to a place they can isolate or to medical care if needed and contact health care providers in advance.
- ❑ [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an individual has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms, the individual should [isolate](#) until:
  - No fever for at least 24 hours since recovery (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) AND
  - Other symptoms have improved (e.g., coughing, shortness of breath) AND
  - At least 10 days have passed since first symptoms
- ❑ [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an individual has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they should [isolate](#) until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test. Anyone who develops symptoms should follow the criteria for when symptomatic individuals can end isolation described above.
- ❑ Any student, faculty, or staff that has had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should immediately quarantine.
- ❑ [Per CDC guidelines](#), students, faculty, and staff should remain in quarantine for up to 14 days after last exposure, assuming they do not become symptomatic or test positive. If they do become symptomatic or test positive, they should follow the isolation criteria above.
  - For more information about quarantining and alternative options to shorten quarantine period please visit [NCDHHS Quarantine Guidance](#) and consult with your local health department.
- ❑ Post signage at the entrances to campus buildings and facilities requesting that people who have been or are symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter, such as [Know Your Ws/Stop if You Have Symptoms](#) flyers (English - [Color](#), [Black & White](#); Spanish - [Color](#), [Black & White](#)).
- ❑ Establish and enforce sick policies to prevent the spread of disease, including:

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- Enforcing faculty and staff staying home if sick.
  - Encouraging liberal use of sick leave policy.
- ❑ Develop plans for backfilling positions of employees on sick leave and consider cross-training to allow for changes of staff duties.
- ❑ Provide remote learning options and flexible attendance policies and testing/exam policies for students unable to be in class due to isolation or quarantine secondary to illness or exposure.
- ❑ Before returning to campus, actively encourage students, faculty and staff who have been sick with COVID-19 [symptoms](#), tested positive for COVID-19, or have been potentially [exposed](#) to someone with COVID-19 (either through [community-related exposure](#) or [international travel](#)) to follow CDC guidance to [self-isolate or stay home](#) until they meet CDC criteria to be released from isolation or quarantine.
- ❑ Make sure that students, faculty and staff who do not reside on campus know they should not come to campus if they are sick, and should notify campus officials (e.g., designated COVID-19 point of contact) if they become sick with COVID-19 [symptoms](#), test positive for COVID-19, or have been [exposed](#) to someone with COVID-19.
- ❑ Once on campus, limit non-essential travel off campus and to other states and countries.
- ❑ Conduct daily screening, which could include daily on-line surveys, to identify [symptoms](#) or close contact to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 (use this standard interview questionnaire) ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)) of students, faculty and staff.
- ❑ Immediately separate and isolate anyone who has [symptoms](#) on screening or becomes sick during the day.
- ❑ Require symptomatic individuals to wear masks until leaving the campus building or facility. Cleaning and disinfecting procedures should be implemented by designated personnel following [CDC guidelines](#) once the sick individual leaves.
- ❑ Notify local health authorities of confirmed COVID-19 cases among students, faculty and staff and coordinate with them regarding control measures, including isolation and quarantine.
- ❑ Ensure that if a person with COVID-19 was on campus while infectious, administrators coordinate with [local health officials](#) to notify students, faculty and staff who might have been exposed immediately while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with FERPA, [NCGS § 130A-143](#), and all other state and federal laws.

### Protecting Vulnerable Populations

Information on who is at higher risk for severe disease is available from the [CDC](#) and [NCDHHS](#).

#### It is recommended that institutions of higher education:

- ❑ Implement remote or other learning options for students who self-identify as high risk for disease.
- ❑ Enable faculty and staff that self-identify as high risk for disease to minimize face-to-face contact and to allow them to maintain a distance of 6 feet from others, modify job responsibilities that limit exposure risk, or to telework if possible.

### Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol reduces the risk of transmission.

#### It is recommended that institutions of higher education:

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- Perform ongoing and routine environmental [cleaning and disinfection](#) of high-touch areas (e.g., door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains, grab bars, hand railings, bathroom stalls, dining hall tables, key pads, keyboards) with an [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#) (the virus that causes COVID-19), and increase disinfection during high-density times. Ensure disinfectant remains on the surface for the contact time recommended by the manufacturer.
  - Paper-based materials, such as books and loose-leaf paper, are not considered high-risk for COVID-19 transmission, and do not need additional cleaning or disinfection procedures.
- Have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors (e.g., soap, paper towels, tissues, and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol).
- Recommend and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Provide hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at every building entrance and exit, in communal spaces, and in every classroom and lecture hall.
- Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers.
- Encourage staff and students to cough and sneeze into their elbows, or to cover with a tissue. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products securely, and allowing for adequate ventilation when staff use such products.
- Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to [clean or disinfect](#).
- Limit use of supplies and equipment (e.g., art supplies, lab equipment, computers) to small groups and disinfect between uses or provide adequate supplies to assign for individual student use.
- Limit sharing of personal items and supplies such as electronic devices, books, pens, and other learning aids.
- Encourage students, faculty and staff to keep their personal items (e.g., cell phones, other electronics) and personal work and living spaces clean. Encourage students, faculty and staff to use disinfectant wipes to wipe down shared desks, lab equipment, and other shared objects and surfaces before use.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk.
- If transport vehicles (e.g., buses, vans) are used, drivers should practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other staff (e.g., hand hygiene, cloth face coverings) and review information for [bus transit operators](#).

### Communication and Combatting Misinformation

Help ensure that the information students, faculty and staff are getting is coming directly from reliable resources. Use resources from a trusted source like the [CDC](#) or [NCDHHS](#) to promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

#### It is recommended that institutions of higher education:

- Clearly communicate the expectation that students, staff, and faculty adhere to the institutions' COVID-19 rules and policies
- Non-adherence with policies should be considered a violation of an honor code or similar set of expectations guiding behavior.



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- ❑ Designate an administrator or office to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and notify all students, faculty and staff who this person is and how to contact them.
- ❑ Disseminate COVID-19 information and combat misinformation through multiple channels to students, faculty and staff.
  - Some reliable sources include [NC DHHS COVID-19 Webpage](#), [Know Your W's: Wear, Wait, Wash](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Latest Updates](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Materials & Resources](#), and the additional resources listed at the end of this guidance document.
- ❑ Post signs, posters, and flyers at main entrances and in key areas throughout campus buildings and facilities such as those found on the [Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19](#) to remind students, faculty and staff to use face coverings, wash hands, and stay six feet apart whenever possible (Wear, Wait, Wash).
  - [Know Your W's](#) signs are available in English and Spanish.
- ❑ Support coping and resilience by:
  - Providing students, faculty and staff with information on how to access [resources for mental health and wellness](#) (e.g., 211 and Hope4NC Helpline 1-855-587-3463).
  - Encouraging students, faculty and staff to take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media if they are feeling overwhelmed or distressed.
  - Promoting students, faculty and staff eating healthy, exercising, getting sleep and finding time to unwind.
  - Encouraging students, faculty and staff to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling.

### Water and Ventilation Systems

When reopening a building after it has been closed for a long period of time, it is important to keep in mind that reduced use of water and ventilation systems can pose their own health hazards. There is an increased risk for Legionella and other bacteria that come from stagnant or standing water.

**Before reopening, it is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- ❑ Follow the CDC's [Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation](#) to minimize the risk of diseases associated with water.
- ❑ Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk to people using the facility.

### Group or Shared Transportation

**It is recommended that institutions of higher education:**

- ❑ Ensure that individuals wear a face covering while on shared transportation (e.g., campus shuttles or buses) unless they have a medical or behavioral health contraindication.
- ❑ Clean and disinfect transportation vehicles regularly, including frequently touched surfaces in the vehicle (e.g. surfaces in the driver's cockpit, seats, arm rests, door handles, seat belt buckles, grab handles).
- ❑ Ensure safe and correct storage of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products away from riders and adequate ventilation when employees are using products.
- ❑ Space riders out to maximize social distancing, ideally 6 feet apart.
- ❑ Have more frequent routes or deploy more vehicles to decrease density of riders.
- ❑ Keep windows open while vehicle to increase air circulation.

- ❑ Provide hand sanitizer for passengers boarding transportation. Hand sanitizer should only remain in the vehicles when they are in use.
- ❑ Encourage students, faculty and staff who use public transportation or ride sharing to follow CDC guidance on [how to protect yourself when using transportation](#) or use forms of transportation that minimize close contact with others (e.g., biking, walking, driving or riding by car either alone or with household members).

## Surveillance and Screening Testing

There is no evidence-based guidance for COVID-19 surveillance or screening testing on institution of higher education (IHE) campuses. However, it is recommended that institutions of higher education develop surveillance or screening plans for campuses in order to monitor COVID-19 spread on campus and provide early detection of cases or clusters.

Surveillance and screening plans developed by North Carolina universities to date have ranged from regular testing of a representative cohort, to testing a set percentage of the student body each week (e.g., 25% of students per week), to weekly or biweekly testing of all students with any on-campus classes or activities.

When forming their surveillance or screening plans, it is recommended IHEs especially consider how they will conduct surveillance of the following populations:

- Students living in on-campus residence halls
- Students participating in fraternities and sororities, especially those living in fraternity or sorority houses
- Student athletes
- Students living off campus
- Faculty and staff present on campus
- Other student populations identified to have increased risk of COVID-19 spread based on local data

While PCR testing is preferred over antigen testing due to [lower sensitivity of antigen tests](#), especially when testing asymptomatic people, antigen testing may present some benefit given the short time to result. If antigen testing is used, [NCDHHS antigen testing guidance](#) should be followed and positive antigen tests should be appropriately confirmed with PCR.

Plans should be made in coordination with the local health department for testing strategies and action plans to use the results of the testing. Absence and sick leave policies for students, faculty and staff should be reviewed to ensure they are consistent with public health guidance, including non-punitive “emergency sick leave” policies for employees without regular sick leave, and these policies should be clearly communicated to all students, faculty and staff to promote maximum effectiveness of testing strategies. IHEs planning screening strategies must take action to support the testing efforts, ensuring facilities and services (e.g., food) to isolate those who test positive and quarantine their close contacts and communicating consistently with the local health department for follow-up and contact tracing plans.

In addition to screening testing, campuses should plan for increased cases on campus. This should include plans for isolation and quarantine of students, increased restrictions on student activities and movements, and de-densification of residence halls if density was not previously limited.<sup>1</sup>

### Testing in the Setting of a COVID-19 Cluster

NCDHHS defines a cluster as a minimum of 5 cases with illness onset or positive result within 14 days AND a plausible linkage between cases (presence in same general setting during same time period). When a cluster is identified at an IHE, a risk-based approach to testing may be used, as per the [CDC's tiered approach](#). If using this approach, prioritization of high-risk groups should be done quickly to avoid delays in testing, and planning should be coordinated with the local health department.

### Isolation and Quarantine

All students who test positive should be isolated until they meet [CDC guidance](#) for release from isolation. Please consult with your local health department on release from isolation for positive students. Please note that there are **no exceptions** for isolation for COVID-19 positive individuals, and testing-based release from isolation is not recommended.

All close contacts to a positive case should quarantine for 14 days. Check with your local health department for options in your area to possibly shorten this quarantine period.

There are no exceptions for isolation and quarantine for student athletes.

### Case Investigation and Contact Tracing

Institutions of higher education should coordinate with their local health departments to make plans for case investigation, contact tracing, and case and contact information data sharing. Effective communication and data sharing are essential for outbreak control. Plans for case investigation and contact tracing, including a **communication plan, roles and responsibilities, and data sharing mechanisms**, should be formalized as part of a memorandum of understanding or similar document. A communication plan should include points of contact for both entities, a regular meeting schedule that can be adjusted based on case numbers, and defined frequency of data sharing. Respective roles and responsibilities can be described by different models of collaboration in case investigation and contact tracing, which include:

- a fully integrated model, where case interview and contact identification, notification and monitoring are carried out by the institution of higher education, in collaboration with the local health department;
- an embedded model, where case investigation and contact tracing are carried out by health department or surge staff who are located at the institution of higher education; or

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<sup>1</sup> In an outbreak at one university during the fall semester, it was noted that suite style residence halls had a higher positivity rate compared to “double barrel hall” residence halls. When making decisions about which residence halls to de-densify, IHEs should consider prioritizing de-densification of suite style residence halls over “double barrel hall” style residence halls.

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- a data sharing model, where the institution of higher education and the local health department develop mechanisms for secure data sharing, and all case investigation and contact tracing is conducted by the local health department.

As part of all models, critical data for institutions of higher education to share with local health departments include:

- names and identifying information about cases identified through on-campus testing;
- contact information;
- information relevant to identifying clusters (e.g., housing, activities, and classes).
- If the institution of higher education is conducting a case interview, they should also share key dates: symptom onset and testing date, and names, contact information, and exposure date of contacts.

Local health departments may also share data with IHEs under G.S. 130A-143(4) that is necessary to protect public health and implement communicable disease control measures, such as outbreak control. This sharing should be limited to the minimum necessary information for this purpose. Relevant data are:

- Information on cases among IHE student and staff population linked to IHE clusters identified through off-campus testing and their associated dates of testing;
- Information on contacts identified through local health department case investigation that are part of the IHE student and staff population.

Both entities should regularly share information on potential clusters.

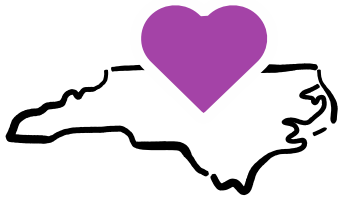
Mechanisms for sharing data include: secure emails; spreadsheets that can be accessed securely by both entities; website portals for data entry; or provision of access to data systems to staff at another organization. Institutions of higher education may access and use the contact tracing software used by local health departments, the COVID-19 Community Team Outreach (CCTO) tool, without cost.

### **Outbreak Response**

Institutions of higher education and local health departments should plan to rapidly surge capacity to handle 50-100 cases per day for a period of 2-3 weeks. Institutions of higher education and local health departments should meet frequently to share information about new cases and clusters and to manage outbreaks. CDC recommendations for broader testing can be found [here](#).

### Additional Resources

- NCDHHS: [North Carolina COVID-19](#)
- CDC: [Colleges, Universities, and Higher Learning](#)
- CDC: [Shared and Congregate Housing](#)
- CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- CDC: [Reopening Guidance](#)
- CDC: [Coping with Stress](#)
- EPA: [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- FDA: [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- HHS/OSHA: [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- DHS: [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#)
- Johns Hopkins University Council for Higher Education Association: [COVID-19 Planning Guide for Higher Education](#)



**#StayStrongNC**

**Staying apart brings us together.  
Protect your family and neighbors.**

**Learn more at [nc.gov/covid19](https://nc.gov/covid19).**



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