

Memorandum

To: Chancellors

From: William L. Roper

Date: March 11, 2020

Subject: COVID-19 Preparedness Efforts

The following updates and expands previous guidance from the UNC System to constituent institutions. Please publish this guidance on your university's COVID-19 webpage.

As we have done for the last several weeks, we actively continue to monitor and prepare UNC System institutions to respond to the unfolding COVID-19 epidemic. Like many other universities in the United States, we are consulting with public health officials and working with institutional leaders to ensure the safety and health of our students, faculty, and staff while devising approaches that will allow our universities to continue operations to the extent possible. This is a rapidly evolving situation. We know more now than we did last week and we will know much more in the coming days.

Given what we know at this time, we are asking our institutions to take certain steps, consistent with public health and medical guidelines, all designed to limit and mitigate the transmission of and exposure to COVID-19. Those steps include limiting travel outside of North Carolina, minimizing large gatherings, and moving to alternative means of delivering instruction wherever possible. As you implement these measures and respond to questions from members of your community, please continue to be deliberate and measured and encourage your teams to do the same. Our universities remain open.

Please do not make operational decisions that materially deviate from these instructions without first contacting the System Office.

State of Emergency

Governor Cooper has declared a state of emergency in order to coordinate the State's response and protective actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The governor's declaration does not mention the university system specifically, other than to encourage the expansion of COVID-19 testing capacity, but it should be noted that the governor has the authority to order the closure of the university or its constituent institutions.

Communication with State and Local Agencies

Each institution should be in close communication with representatives from their state and local public health officials to remain up-to-date on the latest news regarding the spread of COVID-19. This is a rapidly evolving situation and it is essential that all decisions made are based on accurate and current information.

In addition, institutions with K-12 students need to remain in contact with representatives from their local LEAs. Guidance and protocols related to K-12 students may differ from that pertaining to institutions of higher education.

Communication within the Institution

Many divisions and departments across your institution will have their work affected by this outbreak, including but not limited to student affairs, academic affairs, campus safety, housing, and student health centers. The System Office has been convening calls with several of these constituencies to share information and to keep them up to date on the latest developments specific to their areas. Please stay in close contact with your department and division heads in order to coordinate both preparation activities and communication with stakeholders. It is important that the institution's messaging regarding this situation is consistent and accurate. Further, please ensure that your institution's pandemic response procedures are up to date and that you are convening regular meetings of your leadership team to prepare for and address issues that may arise during the course of your institution's response.

Suspension of In-Person Instruction

All institutions should be prepared to transition from in-person instruction to a system of alternative course delivery wherever possible no later than **March 20**. To the extent possible, in-person instruction should be suspended and alternative course delivery should commence on **March 23** and continue until otherwise directed. This recognizes that in some cases, in-person instruction will be the only viable method of instruction. In order to allow faculty to prepare for the transition from in-person instruction to alternative course delivery, institutions may extend their spring break for up to one week. The institutions that have completed spring break may elect to suspend classes for up to five (5) days to make preparations. It is important to communicate that the institutions will remain open during this time. It is anticipated that students will be on campus, but reducing the need for students to gather in large groups is intended to help limit the potential spread of COVID-19.

Instituting Telework

Institutions should be prepared, beginning **March 23, 2020**, to implement the steps necessary to facilitate teleworking opportunities to the extent possible for employees whose physical presence is not deemed mandatory or essential with respect to University operations, including the onsite conduct of classes. This directive will remain in effect until further notice.

University Conferences and Events

All institutions are restricted from hosting gatherings of 100 or more people, unless prior written authorization is given by the Chancellor or the Provost. This includes events sponsored by student organizations. When determining whether to cancel or postpone an event, consideration should be given to the anticipated number of participants and the size of the proposed venue because of the transmissibility of the virus in more confined spaces.

University-related Travel

Subject to CDC guidelines and the further direction of public health officials and the UNC System Office, university-sponsored travel outside the State of North Carolina, or within the State to gatherings of 100 or more people, shall be suspended unless prior written authorization to travel is given by the Chancellor or the Provost. This prohibition includes student organizations.

Study Abroad

A number of institutions have recalled students participating in some study abroad programs, particularly those programs in affected areas. All institutions should immediately assess their ability to recall all students currently studying abroad and determine the circumstances in which such a decision would be made. Consideration also needs to be given to the potential cancellation of summer study abroad programs.

Personal Travel

Although the UNC System cannot limit the personal travel of its students and employees, institutions should take steps to strongly discourage travel to areas with active community transmission. Providing information and links to the CDC travel webpage ([here](#)), the State Department travel advisory webpage ([here](#)), and the International Air Transport Association's list of travel restrictions ([here](#)) will be helpful in communicating the risks involved in personal international travel. One important consideration that should be underscored is the potential that those who travel out of the country may have difficulty re-entering the United States.

Return to Campus

Any university community member returning to the United States from an affected area (CDC Levels 2 and 3) should self-quarantine for 14 days before returning to work or school on campus, in consultation with their health care provider. This self-quarantine should, if possible, occur at the individual's home, away from campus. Taking such steps is part of acting as responsible members of the community. Institutions should consult their pandemic plans with regard to individuals who live on campus. Employees who self-quarantine should communicate with their supervisors about working remotely during their period of quarantine.

Institutions should implement protocols to assess the risk of exposure to students and employees returning to campus after travel. This may include having students and employees self-report personal travel, with appropriate follow up by the institution if warranted. If a returning traveler must visit the student health clinic, they should contact the health clinic prior to visiting. If returning travelers are symptomatic, institutions should immediately contact state and local public health officials.

All students and employees should be notified of the potential consequences of returning to campus after traveling, including the potential need to self-quarantine.

COVID-19 Diagnosis of a Student or Employee

In consultation with local public health officials, each institution should review their planned response to a diagnosis of student or employee/faculty member with COVID-19. It is critical that institutions be prepared to work with their local public health officials, if needed, regarding the potential to provide quarantine or isolation space and appropriate health care to affected students.

Discriminatory Behavior

The media has reported incidents of anti-Asian bullying, harassment, and other discriminatory behavior related to the COVID-19 outbreak. Institutions are encouraged to communicate that such behavior is against UNC System policy and will not be tolerated.

General Recommendations

Institutions should communicate to its students and employees the following recommendations:

- Stay at home if you feel sick or present a fever.
- Avoid touching your face without first washing your hands.
- Clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water, or with hand sanitizer, immediately after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or with your sleeve.
- Avoid shaking hands.

The UNC System Office continues to monitor the situation and coordinate outbreak-related activity across the system. Please watch for updates, news, and notices of conference calls initiated by the System Office.