

Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)

The following guidance is intended to supplement the City of Chicago Phase IV Reopening Guidance for [Higher Education](#). Recommendations will change depending on local epidemiology which can be viewed on Chicago's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#). Updated guidance can be found [here](#).

Key Points (updated January 14, 2021)

- IHEs should begin their campus vaccination strategy now. Updated information and communications tools can be found at chi.gov/covidvax.
- Messaging to students and staff around continued safe COVID-19 practices and community mitigation practices off-campus to protect the campus community remains critical.

Considerations for Out-of-State Students and the Travel Order

Given the current high burden of COVID-19 in Chicago and Illinois, students arriving to IHE campuses from high-incidence states should plan to follow the [Emergency Travel Order](#) as follows:

For those coming from **Orange** states

1. Quarantine for 10 days after arrival to Chicago/campus; OR
2. Provide documentation of a pre-arrival negative diagnostic test (antibody tests not acceptable) taken within 72 hours prior to arrival, or if IHEs can provide or arrange for testing, within 72 hours after arrival on campus. If test results are pending on arrival in Chicago, the student must quarantine until they can show documentation of their negative test result. Strict masking, social distancing and avoidance of in-person gatherings (excluding going to class) must be adhered to by students choosing this option.

Parents or guardians from high-incidence states visiting Chicago must follow the same guidelines as anyone else traveling inbound to Chicago from a high-incidence state.

Considerations for Entry Testing and Periodic Repeat Testing

Testing of students, faculty and staff for COVID-19 before allowing campus entry (entry testing) or at periodic intervals has not been systematically studied. However, in combination with other mitigation strategies (e.g., social distancing, cloth face covering, hand washing, enhanced cleaning and disinfection), a strategic testing program could potentially prevent or reduce COVID-19 transmission on campus and increase timeliness of outbreak detection and response. IHEs should refer to the [CDC interim considerations for testing, screening, and outbreak response for IHEs](#).

If a testing approach is implemented, ensure short turn-around time of selected assay, adequate staffing of student health services and the ability to refer students to convenient testing centers. An IHE point of contact should be selected to ensure reporting of positive tests and exposures to CDPH as below.

COVID-19 Reporting to CDPH

IHEs must report to CDPH outbreaks, defined as 5 or more linked cases of COVID-19 occurring within 14 calendar days of each other, within 24 hours of identifying the outbreak. **In order to prevent on-campus COVID-19 transmission by tracking cases related to IHEs, CDPH requests that IHEs also report individual cases in staff and students.** This does not replace notification through electronic laboratory reporting (ELR) or other healthcare provider reporting methods. Cases should be reported using the secure CDPH COVID-19 Online Case Report Form at <https://redcap.link/chicovidreport> (select the option “Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases”) or via a separate submission mechanism coordinated with CDPH.

In order to complete the online case report form, you will need the following information:

- Known campus exposure locations (dormitory, dining hall, classroom, other public setting)
- Total number of classrooms impacted
- Total number of students thought to be exposed
- Total number of staff thought to be exposed
- The positive individual’s reported or observed symptom onset date
- The positive individual’s last date on campus prior to isolation
- Length of isolation period recommended
- Date of student/staff notification (if completed by time of report)
- Additional optional information includes test date (if known), testing provider (if known).

Campus Contact Tracing

Given your access to staff and student records, the need for prompt notification to close contacts, and the ability to distribute mass communication, your institution is best positioned to conduct initial on-campus contact tracing and notification. Support from CDPH can be requested by emailing coronavirus@chicago.gov, but the below should be completed as soon as possible. CDPH will conduct additional follow-up of off-campus close contacts if necessary.

Contact Tracing First Steps

- Above all, ensure the identity of the positive individual is protected.
- Interview the staff member or student by telephone as soon as you receive a verbal or written report that they tested positive. Questions to ask include:
 - Were they were diagnosed through a test?
 - If so, what type (nose swab, mouth/oral swab, or blood test).
 - If they had only an antibody (blood test) and they have not had any symptoms, no further action is required.
 - What was the test date?
 - What was the last day they were on campus? (Please confirm by checking classroom schedules, attendance files)
 - If symptoms, please ask the first day of their symptoms.
 - If NO symptoms, confirm the test date.
- Elicit close contacts (described below)
- Complete the CDPH Online COVID-19 Case Report Form: <https://redcap.link/chicovidreport> (select the option “Community congregate setting: single case or cluster of 2 or more cases”)

Determining Who is a Close Contact

- By definition, close contacts are individuals with whom the positive case was within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more cumulatively over a 24-hour period, **starting 2 days prior to their first day of symptoms (or for asymptomatic individuals their test date) through their last day on campus.**
- Roommates should always be considered a close contact if they shared a room with the case during the above time period.

Isolation/Quarantine Recommendations

Definitions:

- **Isolation** is used to separate people infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, from people who are not infected. These individuals can have symptoms or no symptoms (asymptomatic). People who are in isolation should stay home until it's safe for them to be around others. In the home, anyone sick or infected should separate themselves from others by staying in a specific "sick room" or area and using a separate bathroom (if available).
- **Quarantine** is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others and monitor their health.
- **Symptoms:** People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of reported symptoms – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms can include:
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - This list does not include all possible symptoms, and individuals may experience any, all, or none of these symptoms.

For student or staff with a positive test:

- Ensure the positive individual is aware that they should isolate, meaning stay home and away from others until it has been at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared (or for asymptomatic individuals, from their test date) and at least 24 hours with no fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer.

For student or staff with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, regardless of if they have a known contact:

- CDPH strongly recommends testing for all staff and students with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
- If a student or staff member has symptoms of COVID-19, they should be referred to their healthcare provider or student health for testing and isolated while awaiting the test result.
 - PCR or antigen (Ag) testing is acceptable.
 - If an Ag detection test is negative and there is a high clinical suspicion of COVID-19, confirm with PCR, ideally within 2 days of the initial Ag test.
- If a symptomatic student or staff member tests negative, ensure it has been 24-hours with no fever (without fever-reducing medication) and with improved symptoms before allowing them to return to campus.

For student or staff with an identified close contact exposure:

- On December 2, 2020, CDC provided [shortened quarantine options](#) to reduce the burden of being out of work/school and to promote adherence to quarantine restrictions and contact tracing efforts. IHEs should recognize that this comes with a residual risk of transmission.
- **Though CDC and CDPH [continue to endorse quarantine for 14 days](#)** for close contacts of COVID-19 cases, the CDC also offers the following options:
 - A 10-day quarantine (no testing required if remains asymptomatic and can ensure self-monitoring for symptoms for 14 days)
 - A 7-day quarantine (with testing between days 5 and 7, as long as negative and continues to self-monitor for symptoms for the full 14 days)
 - IHEs should recognize that any option besides the full 14-day quarantine comes with a residual risk of transmission which may or may not be advisable depending on the IHE campus setting and resources.
- It continues to be recommended that all students or staff with close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 get tested 5-9 days after last exposure.
- While masking of staff and students and other precautions are critical to prevent spread of COVID-19 on campus, these factors will not change the recommendation for quarantine of close contacts.

Testing Recommendations

- CDPH strongly recommends testing for all staff and students with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.
- All close contacts (with or without symptoms) should be tested **between days 5 and 9 after exposure to a positive case**. Depending on IHE resources, close contacts of positive cases should be referred to student health or call their healthcare provider to arrange for testing. If other testing options are needed, refer to the [City of Chicago's coronavirus testing website](#).
 - A positive result should be reported by the student or staff to the IHE, who should then report to CDPH.
 - If a close contact develops symptoms at any time during the quarantine period, the individual should be evaluated and tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible, even if they had a previously negative test.

Considerations for Expanded Testing in Response to a Positive Individual

In some IHE settings, broader testing, beyond close contacts, may be recommended as a part of a strategy to control COVID-19 transmission on campus.

- Residence halls, laboratory facilities, and lecture rooms may be settings with the potential for rapid and pervasive spread. Expanded testing might include testing of all people who were in proximity of an individual confirmed to have COVID-19 (e.g., those who shared communal spaces or bathrooms), or testing all individuals within a shared setting (e.g., testing all residents on a floor or an entire residence hall).

Notifications

- Notify the identified close contacts that they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 on campus. It is recommended that you notify exposed staff and students of the exposure via a preferred, successful method of communication on your campus. A sample close contact notification template is included at the end of this document and downloadable at www.chicagohan.org/covid-19 for those you may be unable to reach by other means or if you choose to send a written notification.
 - Instruct them to quarantine for 14 days (or a CDC accepted shortened quarantine length for IHEs choosing to implement a shortened option) from the last day of contact with the person who self-reported (do not reveal the identity of the positive case).
 - Close contacts should monitor their symptoms and contact their medical provider if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.
- All IHE staff and students, regardless of whether they are close contacts or not, should be notified of the positive case, while maintaining confidentiality. You may use the general notification letter template at the end of this document and downloadable at www.chicagohan.org/covid-19 as a guide. Public dashboards are also an acceptable means of keeping your campus community aware of the COVID-19 cases at your IHE.

Cleaning

Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after persons suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the facility. Follow [CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations](#). **Unless otherwise recommended by CDPH, automatic facility closure is not required with a single case of COVID-19 as long as close contacts have been notified of quarantine recommendations.**

Additional Resources

www.chicago.gov/coronavirus

[CDC Guidance for IHEs](#)

[City of Chicago Reopening Guidance](#)

[Illinois Board of Higher Education \(IBHE\) COVID-19 Guidance](#)

Notification Templates

CLOSE CONTACT COMMUNICATION

Subject: Exposure to COVID-19 Case at _(FACILITY)_

Dear _(Individual's Name)_,

We are writing to update you on a recent development regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). We have learned that a _(FACILITY)_ employee/student has been diagnosed with COVID-19. You were identified as a close contact of this individual.

You should monitor your health starting now through _(DATE of 14 days after last exposure to positive case)_. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

You should not go to work or school and should avoid public places during this time.

If you develop [symptoms of COVID-19](#), please contact your medical provider to discuss evaluation and testing. Any individuals who are sick with or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and away from others for at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared and at least 1 day (24 hours) from last fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer. See the Chicago Department of Public Health's [guidance on what to do if you are sick](#). If your symptoms are severe, such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or difficulty waking up, or bluish lips or face, please seek the closest emergency department or call 9-1-1 immediately.

If you do not have symptoms, it is recommended to be tested 5 to 9 days after your exposure to a positive case, which was _DATE_. Close contacts of positive cases are encouraged to call their healthcare provider to arrange for testing. If other testing options are needed, refer to the [City of Chicago's coronavirus testing website](#). Remember that even if you test negative, you must still complete the full 14-day quarantine. If you test positive, you must stay home for at least 10 days after your test date.

For any additional COVID-19 questions or support, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus for the most reliable information. If you do not find the information you need on the website, email coronavirus@chicago.gov.

The health and wellness of our staff and students are the highest priority of _(FACILITY)_. We continue to follow Chicago Department of Public Health and CDC guidelines as we ensure proper protocols and preventative measures are in place for the health and safety of our staff and patrons. Please contact us at _(FACILITY CONTACT INFORMATION)_ if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

(FACILITY LEADERSHIP NAME)

GENERAL COMMUNICATION

Subject: Confirmed COVID-19 Case at _(FACILITY)_

Dear Staff and Families,

We are writing to update you on a recent development regarding the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). We have learned that a _(FACILITY)_ employee/student has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

[The employee/student was last at the facility on (DATE) - only to be included if it can be done without obviously identifying the individual. If needed, give a broad date like “the week of _____.”] To ensure the health and safety of our families and staff, following CDC guidance, _(FACILITY)_ [will ensure/has conducted] a thorough cleaning and disinfection of our facility.

Students and staff who have been identified as having been in close contact with this individual [will be/have been] notified via a separate communication. As a reminder, close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period. Those who had brief, casual contact with an infected individual are not considered at great risk of transmission and, for most people, the illness is generally mild and can be safely managed at home. As always, everyone should monitor their health and stay at home if they develop symptoms. Anyone who develops severe symptoms should seek medical care immediately.

We continue to follow Chicago Department of Public Health and CDC guidelines as we ensure proper protocols and preventative measures are in place for the health and safety of our staff and patrons.

Public Health Guidance

Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever (temperature greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle/body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID-19, please contact your medical provider to discuss whether you need to be evaluated in person or tested.

For severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or difficulty waking up, or bluish lips or face, please seek the closest emergency department or call 9-1-1 immediately.

Any individuals who are sick with or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and away from others for at least 10 days since their symptoms first appeared and at least 1 day (24 hours) from last fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and improved symptoms, whichever is longer.

For any additional COVID-19 questions or support, please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus for the most reliable information. If you do not find the information you need on the website, email coronavirus@chicago.gov. The health and wellness of our staff and students are the highest priority of _(FACILITY)_. Please contact us at _(FACILITY CONTACT INFORMATION)_ if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE
(FACILITY LEADERSHIP NAME)