



University of Idaho

TO: Moscow-Based Faculty, Staff and Students

FROM: Scott Green, President
Torrey Lawrence, Interim Provost and Executive Vice President

DATE: Sept. 28, 2020

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Hot Spots Detected in our Greek System; No Classroom Transmission Found

Summary

Last week, our COVID-19 testing on the Moscow campus identified several hot spots on Greek Row that resulted in eight chapters being placed in quarantine. The outbreak seems isolated to fraternities and sororities, but we will increase our general surveillance testing outside the Greek system this week to verify. Our infection rate for tests last week increased to 11.94%, but tests were targeted to known hot spots on Greek Row. Currently, the number of active positives is about 1% of the total Moscow-based U of I community, including students and employees. Our modelers and Public Health tell us that testing primarily the Greek population is not indicative of the overall infection rate, which is likely much lower.

Public Health believes our classroom protocols are working and they have not identified any classroom transmission through their contact tracing. We recognize, though, despite the safety protocols in place in the classroom, some may have heightened concerns about the increased infection rate. Faculty preferring to teach online may do so **this week** without additional approvals. We ask that you communicate clearly with your students to ensure a smooth transition, keeping in mind you may be required to move back to in-person instruction Monday,

Oct. 5. Any questions should be directed to the dean of your college.

If data collected through Friday, Oct. 2 drives us to online-only instruction, the recommendation is that it be for two weeks. We will update you on our findings on Friday. We ask that everyone remain flexible and patient as we gather more data and provide next steps.

Background

Over the past two weeks, our surveillance testing focused on Greek Row and noted increased viral load in wastewater, helping us understand where targeted testing should be done. Post-Labor Day testing continued to confirm positives in that population. Some chapters have been told to quarantine by Public Health while others have implemented self-imposed quarantine out of an abundance of caution.

We continue to discuss our findings with Idaho Public Health and our modeling team. While many (understandably) try to compare our results to infection rate metrics at other universities, these are not comparable because some of those universities only test close contacts or symptomatic students and employees and some only compare positives to their total population versus actual number of tests performed. In order to continue to address hot spots while getting valid infection rate metrics, we need to significantly increase the diversity of samples taken each week through broader participation.

Once we have more general surveillance data, modeling will help determine whether the strategy to continue targeted testing and quarantine of Greek Row will isolate the threat. Greek Row residents represent approximately 10% of our Moscow-based student body.

Will We Go Online?

As we have learned from other institutions, simply going online is not an effective or preventive response to COVID-19. But temporarily going online, combined with adherence to protocols such as those articulated in the Healthy Vandal Pledge, has

proven to help bring hot spots under control. Should we decide to go online, it will be because the data from our testing this week and subsequent consultation with Public Health and our partners at Gritman Medical Center indicate it is the most effective response. As discussed at our town hall, considerations and decisions about any change in instruction, in order of priority are:

1. **Government Restrictions.** The governor's website has our area listed as "low transmission" and they have not asked us to make any changes to our operations.
2. **Idaho Public Health Recommendations.** We are working closely with Public Health. They do not believe our results are indicative of the true infection rate and performing more general surveillance testing will help us assess the true infection rate.
3. **Gritman Advice and Consultation.** We do not want to overwhelm the healthcare system, and Gritman tells us they have plenty of capacity.
4. **U of I's Isolation Capacity.** We currently have 72 in isolation and have planned for over 170 beds, so we still have plenty of capacity.
5. **Positive Case Numbers within Latah County.** Latah County is identified by Public Health as "minimal risk."
6. **Positive Case Numbers within the U of I Community.** The trend is now becoming a factor for us.
7. **Infection Modeling Advice Prepared Specifically for our Unique Factors.**

Next Steps

We have all seen the benefit of conducting in-person instruction, but we need to obtain a valid general surveillance sample if we are to continue in-person instruction. We will be sending a request for many of our students and employees to participate in testing. If you receive a request, please participate as the results will have a significant impact on our university. If selected to participate, you will receive an email from

covid19questions@uidaho.edu with instructions. Know that we

appreciate you doing your part to help keep our university healthy.

Conclusion

Since we started our official COVID-19 testing on Aug. 6, we have completed approximately 10,000 tests, and the overall percent of positive results is now 1.81%. We have eight more weeks until Thanksgiving break and have much work to do if we are going to be able to continue live instruction. We need to be even more vigilant about adhering to the Healthy Vandal Pledge. Socializing indoors, in large groups, without masks, must be avoided. Continued spread of COVID-19 will cause changes to our delivery methods and ability to remain in person. It may also impact the health of our colleagues. Please continue to wear your face covering, social distance, wash your hands, and if asked, participate in ongoing surveillance testing. If you show symptoms, please call your family doctor or the [Vandal Health Clinic](#) at 208-885-6693.

We truly are all in this together, so please to do your part. For more information on the U of I COVID-19 response, visit [our website](#) and email any questions to covid19questions@uidaho.edu.

Keep Calm and Vandal On.

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