



University of Idaho

TO: University of Idaho Students, Faculty and Staff

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

DATE: Oct. 12, 2020

SUBJECT: Re-Testing of All Moscow Students Going Well, Campus to Return to Original Modalities by Oct. 19

Summary

This past Friday, we received a photo of an engineering class being taught in person. The professor took the photo of his 75 students, all masked and social distanced with their concert lights on from their phones and their thumbs up to let us know all was well. They were appreciative of the opportunity to interact and learn from their professor and peers in person. This experience, the one that has been the hallmark of the University of Idaho since its inception, is what we are fighting to maintain. We have made significant progress toward this goal. We received test results on 3,642 students from last Monday through Sunday evening and saw a positivity rate of 2.20%. By the end of this week, we will have tested most, if not all, of our in-person Moscow-based students and moved any lingering asymptomatic students into isolation. Our number of active positive cases compared to our U of I community population continues to be very low at 1-1.5%. All faculty will return to modalities they started the semester in by Monday, Oct. 19.

Details

Our COVID-19 website reports the results received by Oct. 9 were 2,499 students and a positivity rate of 2.96%. As more results were processed over the weekend the number of

positive cases and rate continued to decline and showed a marked improvement from the week prior, an outcome confirmed by wastewater sampling. These results demonstrate the impact of our Greek community leaders who worked closely with us over the previous weeks to quarantine, test and isolate positive cases. We know this has been hard on our students in quarantine. It can be discouraging as the quarantine exit dates move each time a new positive case is identified. We appreciate how our Greek community took responsibility and did the right things to contain the infection in their chapters. How quickly the virus spread, from low single digits to double digits, even though we had already deployed mitigation tactics, was also instructive. Many students saw first-hand that this virus is indeed unpleasant at best and made some students very sick. No one wants to get COVID-19, and we all need to do our best to continue living the [Healthy Vandal Pledge](#) so that we do not inadvertently bring the virus back to our living groups.

Over the past few weeks, we tested hotspots to enable quicker isolation of positive cases, which contributed to the higher positive rates in our test results. We currently have three fraternity and sororities in quarantine, down from 14 last week, and 31 students from Greek and on-campus residences in isolation. While the focused testing of hotspots was effective and enabled the university to quickly implement mitigation tactics, it did not give us a good sense of the campuswide infection rate. Surveillance testing helps our modelers better predict the course of the virus. After we have completed the full retest, we will again take up general surveillance testing until Thanksgiving Break. We expect that by testing all students, isolating the positives and continuing to take the Healthy Vandal Pledge seriously, we will experience a much lower positivity rate over the next few weeks.

Last week, a White House working group recommended that some Idaho universities go online, including the University of Idaho, citing an 80.7% positivity rate among 18-24 year-olds in Latah County. Obviously, this data is incorrect. The White House working group would have no way of knowing that we are a

masked community, have our own lab, that we aggressively test asymptomatic students and employees, that we model the positive cases and respond to results, that we monitor and respond to wastewater sampling, or that the positive cases we have experienced were isolated to particular living groups. We thank the White House for their recommendations, but we will continue to work with Idaho Public Health and Gritman Medical Center to make decisions based on accurate data that are right for our community.

Classes and Testing

Instructors may continue to choose how to deliver their classes this week. Staff should work with supervisors to determine the best work arrangement for the unit. We should finish testing the remaining students in the next few days and recognize that managing classes during this period will continue to be a challenge. Again, thank you for your patience and flexibility during this difficult time.

The Gritman nursing staff and our lab worked at full capacity this past week and swabbed, processed and reported all results by Sunday. We owe a debt of gratitude to these dedicated professionals. This work was exhausting and performed with an admirable sense of mission. For students still needing to test, refer to the email you received from covid19questions@uidaho.edu for details. As a reminder, if you have been tested since Sept. 28, previously tested positive or are not taking any in-person classes, you will not be required to retest. Testing will be at the Student Recreation Center. If you are symptomatic, email covid19questions@uidaho.edu to set up a test at Gritman's Martin Wellness Center. Transportation to the center is available through [Parking and Transportation Services](#). After Friday, Oct. 16, ineligibility lists will be populated with any students who have not been tested or tested positive. Those students will not be permitted to attend any classes in person starting Oct. 19.

Faculty and staff will continue to be invited to participate in random general surveillance testing each week. If you receive

an email invitation, please participate. The more test results we have, the better we can respond to positive cases.

Going Forward

We continue to see troubling spikes in positive cases in certain counties across Idaho. There is little doubt that unnecessarily traveling outside of Moscow puts us at risk and could lead to making yourself or those around you sick. For those employees who must travel, take precautions. While our community takes the Healthy Vandal Pledge seriously, many areas of high infection do not have similar practices nor do they comply with mask mandates, making inadvertent infection possible. Travel is still discouraged unless necessary. If you do travel, test at least six days after returning from travel — this gives the virus time to incubate so you do not become an unintended source of infection. In the meantime, you should limit your interactions and follow COVID-19 safety protocols. Our goal is to continue in-person course delivery until Thanksgiving Break — that is a six-week commitment we all need to make to each other and to our university.

Again, a big thank you to our students, faculty and staff for continuing to participate in testing and in quarantine when asked. I know it isn't comfortable, but it is necessary. Testing combined with following the Healthy Vandal Pledge, will keep our campus healthy and on track to reach our goal — a full semester together as Vandals.

Keep Calm and Vandal On.

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