



UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

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Dear Colleagues:

As we settle into the third week of the semester, we hope you are keeping warm and enjoying the snow that continues to fall across our region. Unfortunately, the weather pattern that is making our campus so beautiful is creating untold hardships for many people and families across the nation this week, and we ask that you keep them in your thoughts and prayers. Here is a brief update.

Responding to the recent increase in COVID-19 cases

Those who are keeping an eye on the COVID-19 [dashboard](#) know we have seen an increase in the number of new positive cases over the past week. We are watching the numbers carefully, and, as we mentioned in our letter to the entire campus community last week, will update you promptly if additional measures are required. We have carefully reviewed data from contact tracing and did a deep dive during the 10-week break on all of our data. We do not see evidence of classroom transmission or transmission in research settings.

Though not a panacea, our increased surveillance testing capacity provides us with much better visibility into the spread of the virus. In addition, our statistically driven adaptive testing is likely at least partially responsible for the higher case numbers as we get better at finding pockets of increased risk. We are considering adjustments to policies and protocols should the numbers continue at the current higher rates.

Recommended faculty, staff, and graduate student surveillance testing

Only about half of the graduate students, faculty, and staff members eligible for free bi-weekly saliva-based surveillance testing have scheduled an appointment. For those who may be concerned about the time or effort required, our data indicate that, even during class exchanges when the testing center is busiest, testing takes less than 6 minutes from the time you walk in the door to the time you leave. Our own experience has been faster than that, as we tend to avoid the times between classes. We strongly encourage those eligible who have not yet done so to schedule a bi-weekly appointment at [this link](#).

Clarifying Notre Dame and CDC guidance

Some of you have asked about instances where it seems Notre Dame and CDC guidance differ – most notably surrounding quarantine requirements and recommendations to wear two masks instead of one. CDC has stated that it is unnecessary for asymptomatic individuals who previously had the virus to quarantine due to subsequent close-contact exposure. At Notre Dame, if a person is within 90 days of previously testing positive, that individual does not need to quarantine or surveillance test. On the 91st day, that individual would be required to participate in all testing (surveillance and symptomatic) and would be required to quarantine, if deemed a close contact. This is consistent with the CDC's goals and addresses potential reinfection, as well as infection potential from virus variants.

Although we do not plan to require or recommend that individuals wear two masks, we agree with CDC that two properly fitted masks, worn correctly, may offer more protection than a single mask. The key is for the mask or masks to form a proper seal around the mouth and nose. We fully support the idea of wearing two masks for those who choose to do so and have provided disposable masks at many campus locations that can be used in combination with cloth masks for this purpose. Those who choose to double mask should check this [CDC guidance](#), which provides helpful hints on maximizing the effectiveness of your mask.

Closing thoughts

We always knew that cold weather would pose unique challenges for student life and social activities as we continue to wrestle with the pandemic. In the coming weeks, we will redouble our focus on these issues as we move through the semester. Because no one has sent us any baby photos recently (hint, hint!), we are resorting to sending along a photo of Carmen Leichty's dog, Apollo, who is ready to play.



Please know that we are grateful for your continued efforts to help us through these challenging times, and remember:

- Wear your mask
- Practice physical distancing
- Wash your hands frequently
- Complete your daily health check
- Keep your scheduled testing appointments

Please be kind and generous to yourself and others.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Marie Lynn Miranda, Provost
Shannon Cullinan, Executive Vice President