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Subj: Reopening the University – Message 15

Dear Colleagues,

At times like these, it's important to recognize that what we're trying to do this semester at Notre Dame is unprecedented. We are trying to offer in-person instruction during a global pandemic. We are trying to create a sense of normalcy for students in abnormal times. We are trying to curb the tendencies of 18-to-22-year-olds to socialize in ways that are not healthy during a pandemic. We are asking our faculty and staff to be critical partners as we work our way through this unusually challenging semester. As we adjust and adapt our plans going forward, this will still be a fight, but we are the *Fighting Irish*.

Here are some important updates:

COVID-19 Numbers

Enhanced Dashboard

Yesterday, we launched an enhanced [COVID-19 dashboard](#) that provides significantly more data, including a rolling seven-day average of positive cases and drop-down menus that allow users to sort some of the data categories.

Surveillance Testing

The new dashboard also began reporting data from the phase two general surveillance testing, which started Friday. We have now done over 1,000 general (non-athletic) surveillance tests on students, with a positivity rate to date of 1.1%. Tomorrow (Wednesday, 8/26), we will include a group of faculty in our general surveillance testing. We will soon also include staff in our general surveillance testing, with an emphasis on customer-facing positions.

Why the Data Sometimes Change

All data on the dashboard and in our master datasets are provisional and subject to change – which is true for most, if not all, of the public dashboards you may be checking. One especially meaningful source of change on our dashboard results from PCR tests that are given on a particular day, for which we do not receive results until 1-2 days later. We count the tests on the day that they were administered. If we get positive results on a subsequent day, we attribute those positives to the day on which the test was taken. This may lead to the number of cases reported on a given day going up a few days later. This gives a more accurate sense of how case numbers are changing over time.

In addition, on a few occasions, in conducting data quality control analysis, we find tests that were originally attributed to the wrong day. When we discover such data issues, we correct them in the master dataset. Because there is an automatic feed from the master dataset to the public dashboard, it would be very difficult for us to notate any such changes in the public dashboard.

How Do Our Numbers Look Right Now

The number of cases diagnosed daily has declined substantially from our peaks last week, but we are still seeing new cases. The number of tests we are doing (diagnostic and surveillance) has increased. Our overall positivity rate (# positive tests/total # of tests) is 12.2%. That number is too high, but is trending down. Our surveillance testing positivity rate is 1.1%. Our Day 4 quarantine test positivity rate is 15.8%, and our Day 7 quarantine test positivity rate is 11.5%. We expect the Day 4 and Day 7 positivity rates to be higher, which is further explained in the next section, because those tests are conducted on close contacts to known positive cases based on our contact tracing efforts.

What Might We Expect in the Next Few Days

We had 85+ cases on each of August 17, 18, and 19, all of whom generated close contacts. The close contacts are in quarantine or isolation. For students who are close contacts, we conduct a PCR test on Day 4. If that is positive, they move from quarantine to isolation. If that is negative, they remain in quarantine, and we conduct a rapid antigen test on Day 7. If the rapid antigen test on Day 7 is negative, the student is cleared and released from quarantine. If it is positive, they move from quarantine to isolation. Importantly, we are required to keep students in quarantine for at least 7 days, regardless of when the close contact occurred with known positive cases. We are aware that there have recently been issues with students who are quarantining in off-campus apartments. We appreciate the feedback we have received and are working to improve this part of the system to ensure that all are brought into the Day 4/Day 7 protocol.

We have been conducting Day 4 testing on the close contacts from the beginning of the August 17-19 peak and will soon conduct Day 7 tests on the earliest close contacts. Because the positivity rates are higher for these quarantine groups, we expect our case numbers to increase in the next few days.

Dealing with Hot Weather this Week

In anticipation of high temperatures this week, three new air-conditioned spaces have been added to those already set aside for students to study and participate in classes remotely. Spaces that have been available since the beginning of the semester include South Dining Hall, North Dining Hall, the Main Hesburgh Library, Duncan Student Center, and LaFortune Student Center. The three new venues available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Sept. 1 are the Joyce Center's Purcell Pavilion and Monogram Room (via Gate 1), the Dahnke Ballroom on the seventh floor of Duncan Student Center, and the Smith Ballroom at the Morris Inn. Ambassadors will be present in each of these locations. Students will be asked to sit where indicated by the HERE decals and should use headphones while listening during online classes so as not to disrupt others.

Care and Wellness for Students in Quarantine and Isolation

Caring for the increasing number of students who entered isolation and quarantine has been a priority. We continue to add resources from across the University to assist in this effort of calling students to inquire about their symptoms and address any pressing needs. Thank you to the significant number of employees from across the University who have stepped up to help make these important calls.

Update on Mental Health and Wellness

Among the many challenges presented by the pandemic are the heightened stress, anxiety, and tension many people are feeling. The CRU hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer questions and to help point students, faculty and staff members to appropriate resources. The CRU hotline is 574-634-HERE (574-634-4373).

Support for Parents and Care-Givers

The [Working Group on Schools and Child/Eldercare](#), which continues its work in support of parents and other care-givers, has two new efforts underway. One is a Google Group for faculty, staff and graduate students who have an active Notre Dame email address. They created the group to help members exchange ideas and information on child and elder care resources and needs. For example, you can find information on drop-in virtual learning assistance, care centers with availability, and support from a community of parents facing what you are. You can join by following instructions at [this link](#). Parents with school-age children at home may also be interested in taking advantage of new free supplemental learning being developed that will provide 12 weeks of virtual learning sessions for children of Notre Dame faculty, staff, and graduate students. All programs will be led by Notre Dame tutors, and the content has been vetted by faculty members in the Education, Schooling, and Society Program and the Robinson Community Learning Center. We ask those interested to complete one of these [survey forms](#) for each child who might participate by 5 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 28. Those who express interest will receive a follow-up email with the formal registration process.

Laboratory Update

There are no plans to reduce access to labs by faculty, technical staff, or graduate students. In fact, Vice President for Research Bob Bernhard sent a message to those involved in laboratory research this past weekend assuring them of our confidence in the safety and compliance of those involved in lab-based research. Our labs have had strong safety protocols in place since they reopened, and we have no indications that we will need to change the current level Phase 3 lab operations, except for the existing temporary restrictions regarding undergraduates.

Gaiters versus Masks

In recent weeks there have been conflicting reports on the effectiveness of wearing neck gaiters as a means to reduce virus transmission. According to research performed at Notre Dame and elsewhere, the effectiveness of neck gaiters – as with others masks, bandanas, and face coverings – depends on factors including the material used, the number of layers of the material, whether it is worn properly, and fit. Several studies concluded that masks provided by the University are very effective. Gaiters are much less effective when stretched thinly to fit over the mouth and nose and when they are wet. Research has shown that gaiters are less effective at containing droplets, and are significantly less effective than a mask at reducing inhalation of viral particles. Thus, we will be communicating with students and others this week that while gaiters may be worn outdoors or when running, they are not a suitable replacement for a mask indoors on the Notre Dame campus, and care should always be taken in the presence of others while wearing a gaiter for virus protection.

Concluding Thoughts

During the past week, we have responded to both expected and unexpected challenges, and we will continue to do so. As Father John noted in his message last week, the novel coronavirus is a formidable foe, and one we must all work together to defeat. Following safety protocols is the most important way to do so. So please:

- Wear your mask
- Practice physical distancing
- Wash your hands regularly
- Complete your daily health check

Be kind to each other and good to yourself.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Marie Lynn Miranda, Provost
Shannon Cullinan, Executive Vice President