

2021

COVID-19 Campus Update, February 4, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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Recommended Citation

Eastern Michigan University, "COVID-19 Campus Update, February 4, 2021" (2021). *COVID-19*. 118.
<https://commons.emich.edu/covid19/118>

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COVID-19 Campus Update – Feb. 4, 2021

Thursday, February 4, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

Our COVID-19 testing data from the past two weeks highlights the critical nature of continuing to follow safe practices – primarily the wearing of proper face coverings that cover the nose and mouth, maintaining six-foot physical distancing, and frequent hand washing (experts say eight times a day) and the use of hand sanitizers.

The data make it clear that the COVID-19 pandemic remains an ever present danger to everyone in our campus community and we must take extra precautions to slow the spread. While the ramping up of vaccine distribution continues, we know it will be several months before enough people -- particularly younger people not in priority populations -- are vaccinated to mitigate the spread of the disease.

It is critical that we all continue to do our part as outlined in the [#EMUSafe Pledge: Take the Pledge. Stop the Spread](#), and that we follow the practices and protocols detailed on the [University's COVID-19 Planning and Preparedness website](#).

I also encourage our campus community to take advantage of the free COVID-19 testing we offer each week. Additional details follow in today's message.

I have several items to cover in this week's update:

- COVID-19 Dashboard
- COVID-19 Testing Changes
- Black History Month
- National Wear Red Day
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence
- Health and Safety Reminder

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending Feb. 2, the University administered 1,497 COVID-19 tests that resulted in 66 positive cases, for a positivity rate of 4.41 percent. During this time period, we confirmed a total of 82 positive cases. Of those, 14 were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and 58 were on-campus students – defined as a student who was living on campus or had visited campus during the applicable time period prior to the time they tested positive. Ten cases were reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 21,286 tests that resulted in 281 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.32 percent. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Our weekly case counts for the past two reporting periods are at their highest levels since the start of the pandemic. We have identified several causes for these increases, and actions have been implemented to address them and mitigate additional spread. We continue to work closely with the Washtenaw County Health Department and appreciate their support of our actions to address the current caseload.

It is important to remember that our overall positivity rate remains low and that the actions we implemented when facing a similar increase in late October/early November effectively resulted in lower case numbers. We will continue to carefully monitor these data and take additional appropriate actions as needed.

COVID-19 Testing Changes

Our free COVID-19 testing for students and employees has been positively received and we have been working hard to expand test availability for the remainder of the semester. We have conducted more than 21,000 tests, at University expense, for students and employees since the start of the pandemic.

As announced last week, it is our intention to further expand on-campus testing – thanks to the University’s purchase of additional test kits. This week we relocated the testing center to the Student Center – it is now stationed on the south side of the building where Amazon formerly operated. This move has gone smoothly and provides us with larger space and a highly visible location. The site also provides easier access to parking and bathrooms, and offers improved accessibility. We will continue to offer testing at this location to our campus community, while increasing mandatory testing for students living in EMU residential housing and other higher risk populations. Please continue to monitor your email for updates on next week’s testing schedule.

Black History Month

In honor of Black History Month, Eastern Michigan University is offering a number of virtual open-to-the-public events that will help to celebrate and reflect upon Black history. The theme for EMU’s 2021 Black History Month celebration is “*A Tribute to our Blackness.*” A roundup of Black History Month events is below. Please visit the [Black History Month news release on EMU Today](#) for additional details about the events and registration information.

- Tuesday, Feb. 9, 5 p.m.: What Does Black History Month Mean to Us
- Thursday, Feb. 11, 6 p.m.: Black Excellence in the Workplace: Financial Literacy
- Thursday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m.: Black History Month Jeopardy
- Thursday, Feb. 18, 6 - 8 p.m.: The State of Civil Rights in America: What Does the Future Portend?
- Thursday, Feb. 18, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.: Star Lecture Series: An Ordinary Black Woman's Journey toward Social Justice and Empowerment

- Wednesday, Feb. 24, 7 p.m.: Who Will Save American Democracy? The Role of Women, Young Voters and People of Color in American Politics
- Thursday, Feb. 25, 4 - 5:30 p.m.: Lost Opportunity: Willis Ward, the Strike at Willow Run, and the Rise of Civil Rights Unionism in Detroit

In addition, the EMU Center of Race and Ethnicity (CORE) will celebrate on social media through the month by honoring prominent Black figures and key historical events. Visit CORE's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages to view the posts.

The University's social channels will feature extended interviews with EMU community leaders, including: Regents Eunice Jeffries, Alex Simpson, Dr. Jessie Kimbrough Marshall and Nathan Ford; recent John W. Porter Distinguished Service Award recipient Greg Peoples; and Professor Rema Reynolds, who was recently honored with the 2021 MLK Humanitarian Award as part of the University's Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. The interviews will air on the University's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

For more information on EMU events, visit the [EMU Today calendar](#).

National Wear Red Day

The first Friday in February (tomorrow, Feb. 5) is [National Wear Red Day](#), designed to bring awareness to women's heart health. Supported by the American Heart Association in conjunction with American Heart Month, people across the country wear the color red in order to raise and spread awareness in hopes to help eradicate heart disease and stroke.

The University is a long-standing sponsor of the American Heart Association's Heart Walk. This year's [Washtenaw County Heart Walk](#) is schedule to take place on May 22 at Rynearson Stadium. Please join me in wearing red tomorrow to raise awareness about heart health! Share your photos on the University's social channels by using the hashtags #EMUForHeartHealth and #TRUEMU.

Swoop's Food Pantry Update

The winter hours for the John and Angie Sabo Swoop's Food Pantry Room are Mondays 12 - 5 p.m., Wednesdays 12 - 6:30 p.m., and Thursdays 12 - 5 p.m.

Shoppers are requested to complete an [Online Shopping Request Form](#) before arriving. Items will be bagged by staff and brought out to clients when they arrive. Visitors to Swoop's can enter through the main entrance on the north side of Pierce Hall near the elevator. Swoop's requires any student who has not used the pantry this year to complete the new [2020-21 Swoop's Food Pantry Intake Form](#).

The items needed are: grape jelly, gluten-free pasta, rice, salad dressing, ramen noodles, large snack items, re-usable bags, hand sanitizer, hand soap, and milk and cheese.

If you wish to donate items, please email swoops_pantry@emich.edu in advance to make sure someone is present to handle your delivery. Please maintain physical distancing when picking up or delivering items to the Pantry.

Celebrating Eastern Michigan University excellence

Please join me in celebrating these fine examples of Eastern excellence:

- The Eastern Michigan University Moot Court Program experienced the broadest level of success this year in its distinguished history, with numerous competitors excelling in tough regional competition and two teams advancing to the national tournament. The excellent showing by numerous EMU students comes on the heels of last year's overall national title, won by Charles Graham III, a senior this year, and Kelsey Hall, who graduated. Team coach Barry Pyle, a professor of political science at EMU, says last year was wonderful, but this year is even more satisfying. "Last year was great, but to me, as an educator, this year was even better," Pyle said. "There were so many people who did so well ... It's a whole panoply of students who don't get the press, but get the education and experience here at Eastern, and they take that with them into law school and enjoy powerful legal careers." You can read more about this special season in the [story on EMU Today](#).
- In March 2020, the Eastern Michigan University student Baja racing team was gearing up to compete in a national competition. They were hard at work building and making improvements on the EMU Baja car in hopes of winning at the competition to take place a couple months later—until the pandemic hit. While the competition was moved virtually, the team members competed, without driving the car they'd worked so hard on. The team placed 44th out of 100 in the virtual event by presenting its design and business plans to a panel of judges. While the experience was still beneficial to the team, it was a disappointment to not be able to drive the car. Fast-forward to today, and the Baja team has its sights set on a 2021 victory more than ever. Its chances are strong, with more experience and a \$5,000 Ford Motor Company Fund grant to help the team get there. For more details, see the [Baja Car story on EMU Today](#).

Congratulations to everyone involved in these fine efforts!

Health and Safety Reminder

An important reminder as I conclude. Please continue to:

- Practice effective hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers;
- Wear face coverings; and,
- Observe physical distancing.

These three actions, when taken together, dramatically reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19.

I thank you for your work on behalf of the University and your ongoing support of our #EMUSafe initiatives. Please continue to follow the [University's COVID-19 Planning and Preparedness website](#) for ongoing updates.

James Smith, Ph.D.