

2021

## COVID-19 Campus Update, February 25, 2021

Eastern Michigan University

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COVID-19 Campus Update – Feb. 25, 2021

Thursday, February 25, 2021

To the Eastern Michigan University community:

COVID-19 cases among students, faculty and staff continue to decline significantly, thanks to the targeted and aggressive approach of our COVID operations team. The efforts span several offices and individuals – and include extensive contact tracing, telehealth evaluations, testing, wastewater monitoring, and the isolation and quarantining of potentially exposed individuals. These efforts have become a full-time priority for many on our team, including housing and dining staff, and testing and medical support staff. I can't thank and acknowledge these team members enough for their dedication, commitment and plain old hard work.

As we approach the one-year mark of our massive and unprecedented transition to mostly online learning, I extend my deep appreciation to our faculty, who converted in-person courses to online under extraordinary circumstances. I also acknowledge the fine efforts of our facilities and other operational teams who helped implement [our Safe Return to Campus Plan](#).

Eastern Michigan University students have excelled in their compliance to our #EMUSafe initiatives. Our students continue to show true Eagle spirit in protecting fellow students and community members – by maintaining physical distancing, avoiding gatherings, and wearing face coverings.

This coordinated and comprehensive effort among our entire community of students, faculty and staff is one of the finest responses to a crisis that I have observed in my professional career. Again, my deepest thanks to everyone involved.

We have several items to cover in this week's message:

- COVID-19 Dashboard
- COVID-19 Testing
- Washtenaw County Health Department Vaccination Update
- University Wellness Days March 3 & 4
- April Commencement
- Black History Month
- Center for Jewish Studies Presents Mira Awad: A Concert/Conversation/Women's History Month
- Swoop's Food Pantry Update
- Celebrating Eastern Michigan University Excellence
- Health and Safety Reminder

COVID-19 Dashboard

In the seven days ending Feb. 23, the University administered 1,233 COVID-19 tests that resulted in five positive cases, for a positivity rate of 0.41 percent. During this time, we confirmed a total of seven positive cases. This represents a dramatic decline from the 82 cases in the final week of January and returns our positive case count to the low levels of the fall semester.

Of the seven cases reported last week, five were students who live off-campus and had no contact with campus prior to the time they tested positive and two 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. No cases were reported among University employees.

Since Aug. 12, the University has administered a total of 25,518 tests with 323 positive results for an overall positivity rate of 1.27 percent -- considerably lower than state and national tracking. Complete details can be found on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

### COVID-19 Testing

We continue to provide free COVID-19 testing at University expense. Student populations living in on-campus housing are among the prioritized testing groups, but each week testing is opened for all University students and employees. Next week testing in the Student Center will be open Tuesday – Thursday, from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. The new testing process is fast and easy; results are provided within a matter of hours. You must register in advance; on-site registration is not permitted. Please visit [emich.edu/covid-testing](https://emich.edu/covid-testing) to complete your profile and reserve a time. Student Body President Luis Romero [explains the testing process in this video](#).

### Washtenaw County Health Department Vaccination Update

The Washtenaw County Health Department (WCHD) continues to schedule appointments for individuals currently eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, including EMU employees and students who fit into priority categories defined by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Although EMU does not determine these prioritizations, we continue to advocate to government officials that EMU faculty and staff are critical to the functioning of the University and that vaccination prioritizations should reflect that fact. President Biden and other government officials have stated that vaccinations should be available to every adult who wants one by mid-summer.

Vaccinations will remain by appointment only through the WCHD registration website. Complete details and registration information can be found in [yesterday's vaccination update to campus](#).

### Personal Wellness Days March 3 & 4

As announced in December, Wednesday, March 3, and Thursday, March 4, have been designated as academic personal wellness days. My thanks to the Faculty Senate and Provost Longworth for working with me to provide students and faculty with a well-deserved opportunity to catch up and take time for personal care, particularly with this year's elimination of the traditional one-week winter recess. It is important to note that University offices will remain in operation, but no classes will be held on these two days. Based on questions we have been receiving, I want to emphasize that there are to be no class meetings or activities, virtual or in-person, on the personal wellness days. If you wouldn't have the activity in an equivalent in-person format, it should not be held or conducted or due on these days. Students who have questions or concerns should contact the dean of their college for assistance.

The Student Affairs Programming Committee has scheduled a variety of personal wellness events that will take place via Zoom each day. You can find a [list of these events on EMU Today](#) and on the [University calendar](#). The Rec/IM will remain open during its standard hours from 8 a.m. – 9 p.m. offering a full range of activities, including a ping pong tournament next Thursday from 5 – 7 p.m. Information about dining options can be found at the [EMU Dining website](#). The Student Center will be open both days from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Free COVID-19 testing, as noted earlier in this message, will continue in the Student Center from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

#### April Commencement

We congratulate our students who are nearing the completion of their degrees. We are proud of their accomplishments over the past several years and particularly during the last eleven months, which have been extremely challenging.

Unfortunately, the still-limited rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine and government regulations limiting the size of public gatherings will not allow us to host an in-person graduation ceremony in April. This is disappointing news for our graduates, their families, and faculty and staff. Celebrating our graduates in the Convocation Center is one of my favorite events of the year. We join with many other universities that have made the same decision.

We are planning several activities to celebrate our graduating students and will continue to communicate directly with students who have applied to graduate. A formal ceremony video will be posted at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, April 25. Graduates, families and friends can view the video at that time, or anytime after that at their convenience, on the University's YouTube channel. Students who apply to graduate by March 26 will have their names included in the formal video and posted on the Commencement website. Please visit [the Records and Registration graduation website](#) to apply for graduation and to find other details and deadlines. Also visit [the Commencement website](#) for ongoing updates about the ceremony as well as the distribution of diplomas and the ordering of regalia.

#### Black History Month

Black History Month programming has been extensive and stimulating. I would like to express thanks to all faculty, staff and students who have participated in these efforts for reaffirming that Black History is American History – and is to be celebrated 365 days a year. Tomorrow’s event, “Art and Soul of Black Broadway,” focuses on the history of Washington, D.C.’s U Street. It takes place from 6 – 7 p.m. Visit [the EMU Today calendar](#) for registration information and details about all University happenings.

The extended social media interviews with University leaders continue tomorrow with Regent Nathan Ford. The interviews are featured on the [University’s Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#). Previous interviews this month include Board of Regents Chair Eunice Jeffries, Regents Alexander Simpson and Dr. Jessie Kimbrough Marshall, Dr. Rema Reynolds, Greg Peoples, Mark S. Lee and Dr. N.J. Akbar. These interviews can be viewed on YouTube.

### Center for Jewish Studies Presents Mira Awad: A Concert and Conversation/ Women’s History Month

March is Women’s History Month. We are proud to provide several events that shine a light on women’s rights around the world and on racial equality for women of color. The EMU Center for Jewish Studies begins Women’s History Month programming with “Mira Awad: A Concert/Conversation” on Sunday, March 7, at 3 p.m. The Israeli/Palestinian singer songwriter, actress, artist and content creator will perform and speak to attendees. Awad has been a forceful activist for women’s rights, equal citizenship for Palestinians living in Israel, a two-state solution, and environmental awareness. This free event will be streamed live on EMU’s Facebook and YouTube pages. Details about other Women’s History Month programming can be found on [the Women’s History Month story on EMU Today](#).

### 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 [Swoop's Food Pantry Intake Form](#).

Swoop’s indicates the demand for spices and seasonings has been great and this week they are seeking salt and pepper, garlic and onion powder, red pepper flakes, seasoning mixes, and other spices.

If you wish to donate items, please email [swoops\\_pantry@emich.edu](mailto: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:

For the fourth consecutive year, Eastern Michigan University has been named one of the top military and veteran friendly universities in the country, according to annual rankings released this month by Military Friendly. EMU ranked second among large public universities in the United States, and first in the state of Michigan in the annual listing.

Lt. Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.) Mike Wise, assistant director of Military and Veteran Services at Eastern, said, “EMU military and veteran students and their families have exceptional support throughout the campus, from the top on down. Eastern Michigan’s pledge to military and veteran students is evidenced through its commitment to student veteran support, its establishment of a veteran support center and a 69-year commitment to its Army ROTC program.” You can read more about this meaningful designation and our veterans support services in [the story on EMU Today](#).

In another terrific honor, the bachelor’s degree program in paralegal studies has been ranked among the 20 best in the nation, and the number one public university program in Michigan. The ranking was provided by Study.com, a website that helps students research potential schools, degrees and careers. It selected Eastern’s paralegal program based on U.S. Department of Education data, academic and career resources, quality of education and faculty.

Elizabeth Donovan, a professor in the School of Technology and Professional Services Management in the College of Engineering and Technology, said, “Equipped with technological skills as well as critical thinking skills, our graduates are perfectly positioned for employment in an array of settings, as well as graduate studies in fields such as business or law.” You can learn more about the program and the ranking in [the EMU Today story](#).

Congratulations to the students, faculty, staff and alumni who represent Eastern so well!

### 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.