

2022

COVID-19 Campus Update, January 14, 2022

Eastern Michigan University

Friday, January 14, 2022

Campus Update – January 14, 2022

The following is an excerpt of the Jan. 14, 2022 message to campus that pertains to the COVID-19 pandemic:

To the Eastern Michigan University community,

Welcome to 2022 and the first week of the winter semester. I understand our remote start to the semester is not what any of us had planned as 2021 concluded, but the volatility of COVID-19 again reared its dangerous head with a new variant and an explosion of new cases. As I have promised since the start of the pandemic, Eastern Michigan University is committed to moving rapidly to adjust our multi-layered safety protocols as events dictate. And this latest surge in cases – locally, statewide, and across the country – is certainly such an event. This is a key factor in our decision, announced earlier this week, to extend remote learning for an additional week through Jan. 23. New information emerges each day about this variant's transmissibility and potential differences in symptoms and severity from past infections. We will keep monitoring and adapting to what's learned. We will stay focused on the safety of our shared spaces and take necessary measures to ensure it through our policies and practices. Thank you to all for your support of these public health measures.

COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts

- Mandatory testing of non-vaccinated employees to begin: EMU's policy that all employees must be vaccinated or tested weekly remains in effect. This [policy](#) was outlined in detail last month. Yesterday's U.S. Supreme Court decision that OSHA does not have authority to require employers to impose a policy of this nature does not impact EMU's institutional policy. The Court has allowed public employers such as EMU – separate from any action by OSHA – to enact policies just like ours. The University has consistently communicated that our Employee Vaccination/Screening Policy is the correct and balanced approach for our campus, and the policy will be implemented as planned.

Mandatory weekly testing begins on Monday for regular employees who are not vaccinated and who have not [reported their vaccination status](#) to the University. The vast majority of University employees are vaccinated and have reported their vaccination status to the University, and are therefore not required to complete weekly testing. Those employees who are required to undergo weekly testing have been notified repeatedly via email. A new feature on the University's [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) details the University's overall employee vaccination rate, which currently is 88.2%. The data also show vaccination rates

among the various full-time, regular employee groups.

- COVID-19 testing: The COVID-19 Testing Center in the Student Center reopened after the winter break last Wednesday, Jan. 5. The one-day volume of tests provided on that day was our highest ever, at more than 400, and the remainder of the week and beginning of this week we continue to see a high number of tests conducted. As you would expect given the recent surge, we also are seeing a significantly higher than average number of positive cases. The number of tests conducted from Wednesday, Jan. 5 to Tuesday, Jan. 11, totals 1,649. Of those, 209 positive cases were identified for a weekly positivity rate of 12.67%. During this time, we reported a total of 369 positive cases, which includes information reported from students, faculty and staff who had external tests. This represents the University's highest weekly positivity rate to date, and is consistent with the dramatic increase in case numbers and positivity rates we see in the surrounding community, state and nation. As noted above, these data are a factor in our decision to extend remote class formats through Jan. 23 and reinforces the rationale for the additional mandatory testing protocols in place.

The Testing Center will be open today (Friday, Jan. 14) from 9 a.m. to noon, and tomorrow, Saturday, Jan. 15, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The full schedule next week can be found on the [Testing Center website](#). We welcome the increasing number of students, faculty and staff who are being tested regularly, as this is an important element of our mitigation strategy.

- Evolving face mask guidance: In light of evolving Centers for Disease Control guidance, we are reviewing our face mask policy and will be recommending changes to our current protocols in the days ahead.
- Residential students, vaccinations and testing requirements: Vaccinations continue to be required for students living in University housing. In addition, residential students must provide verification of a negative test following the winter break.
- Vaccination clinic draws more than 600: Last Saturday's (Jan. 8) vaccination clinic in the Student Center Ballroom resulted in more than 600 people receiving a first, second or third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. More than 800 people attended, including parents bringing in children 12-15 years old for vaccinations. Leadership from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) was extremely complementary to the University and our team, led by Dean of Students Ellen Gold, who coordinated the effort alongside MDHHS staff. Given the large turnout, more clinics are planned in the future.

These items represent just a handful of the many initiatives in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 among our campus community. We continue to closely monitor public health guidance, and meet with Washtenaw County Health Department experts

regularly to evaluate, reassess and to consider adjustments to our protocols. The full range of policies, guidelines and safety protocols, for students, faculty and staff, can be found on the [#EMUSafe website](#).

Health and Safety Reminder

Given the recent surge in positive cases of COVID-19, it's important to reiterate some of the key safety protocols that each of us should follow:

- Practice effective hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers;
- Wear face coverings, particularly when indoors in public areas;
- Observe physical distancing; and,
- Get vaccinated (or boosted) if you are eligible.

These actions, when taken together, dramatically reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19. And, vaccination minimizes the severity of cases in most situations, for those who do contract the virus.

As always, I thank you for your work on behalf of the University and your ongoing support of our #EMUSafe initiatives. Please continue to monitor your University email for future updates.

James Smith, Ph.D.