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Coronavirus Update 1-15-21

The Coronavirus Planning Team

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Coronavirus Update 1-15-21

Dear members of the Sacred Heart University community,

We want to remind you about the virtual town hall meeting on Tuesday for students and parents with information about returning for the spring semester. We hope you all will [join us](#), and we invite you to [submit questions](#) in advance of the meeting.

The Importance of Masks and Social Distancing

SHU Professor Sofia Pendley is quoted in [an article on diverseeducation.com](#) about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on college campuses. The article discusses a study on COVID prevention that found that extensive distancing and mandatory mask wearing alone can prevent 87% of campus COVID-19 infections. In the article, Professor Pendley shares SHU's success in preventing spread in the classroom using these protocols. It's important that we practice social distancing and mask wearing everywhere so that we can duplicate the success we have had in the classroom. This includes keeping your distance at all times from people who are not in your pod (roommates). If we can be successful, that will mean we can continue to have athletic practices and games, that we will not have to isolate and quarantine as much, and we can continue to have a more normal on-ground experience on campus.

Another happy result of our vigilance with masking and social distancing has been a significant reduction in the number of flu cases on campus so far this year.

Variants of the Virus

SHU Professor Jackie Vernarelli has shared some information on the variants of the virus and why they are more easily transmitted. She explains that the new variants have evolved to more efficiently penetrate the body's cells due to a mutation in the spike protein. This means, when you are exposed to even small amounts of the virus, those small amounts can better get into your cells where the virus can replicate and "take hold." She says there is also some thought that the variants may cause people to carry a higher viral load. The implication of that is that you will expel more virus per cough or sneeze than with other strains. This has not been verified, however.

She says that it is natural and expected that a coronavirus will mutate, and that we will see more variants during the course of the pandemic. It's likely that the dominant variants in the community will be those that are more efficient at infecting people. The good news, she says, is that infectious disease specialists remain confident in the vaccine—even with the new strains circulating—and that our existing protocols (masks, social distancing, tight pods) are still considered the best way to stop the spread. It's just all the more important that we all continue to be vigilant and make smart choices.

An [article in the New York Times](#) today expands on what Professor Vernarelli is telling us noting that CDC forecasts indicate that the new variants could cause a burgeoning pandemic over the winter creating a strain on the hospitals. They note that the variant is not known to be more deadly or cause more severe disease, but it is more prevalent. Therefore, they are asking Americans to double down on all safety measures—wearing masks, maintaining social distance, frequent hand washing, reducing interactions

with people outside your household, limiting contact and avoiding crowds. They also cite the need for more intensive vaccination efforts across the country.

Vaccine

We are continuing to gear up for Phase 1B of the vaccine, which will impact on-ground faculty and staff who have regular contact with students. We are putting together a list for the state of those faculty and staff who should be included in this second phase and are prepared to move as soon as the state is ready.

We also want to remind everyone that those who are 75 and older can register now to receive the vaccine. More information is available on the [state portal](#).

SHU is currently in talks with Hartford HealthCare (St. Vincent's Medical Center) and Yale New Haven Health about partnering to offer a mass vaccine site at Sacred Heart. Should that happen, eligible staff and students would be able to receive the vaccine on campus. Although SHU community members would not receive special consideration, it will provide a convenient site for vaccination.

Testing

Testing will be available for faculty and staff on Wednesday, February 20. Please [register](#) if you would like to be tested.

Health Services Hours

In response to your request for weekend hours, health services has changed its hours for the spring semester. The center will be open from 8:30-6:30 Monday through Friday. Weekend appointments will be available via telehealth for students who have new onset COVID-19 symptoms only between the hours of 10 and 3 on Saturdays and Sundays. Staff will be onsite for testing only. Please remember that all visits at health services are by appointment only and it is necessary to call ahead of time (203-371-7838). At busy times, you may need to call more than once.

Student Accessibility to Health Services

Health services is asking that students be accessible by phone, especially for the purposes of communicating test results. If you test positive, it is imperative that they reach you as quickly as possible to keep those around you safe. They are finding that you understandably don't answer calls from numbers you don't recognize and often your voice mailboxes are full. Since they don't like to send health information by email, they are suggesting that you go into your health portal and enable text messaging. Just click on the Profile tab, then input the necessary information under Mobile Phone and Text Messaging to enable text messaging (including your mobile phone carrier). Health Services will then be able to reach you by text when they need to talk with you. Thank you.

Let's Have Fun During Cautionary Quarantine!

Are you packing your ice skates and a helmet? The University is building a temporary outdoor ice rink in the chapel quad to provide another opportunity to get outside for a while during cautionary quarantine. You will also be able to run or walk on the track at Campus Field, and there may be limited appointments available at the Bobby Valentine Recreation Center. In all cases, use will be determined by social distancing.

Positive Cases

As of today, our [dashboard](#) shows 11 active cases and one active case isolating on campus. As a reminder, if you were previously in our system as active, and you have not already done so, you must contact health services at 203-371-7838 (students) or provide human resources with documentation of your recovery (faculty and staff) so that you can be cleared to return to campus. If we cannot clear you, we will not be able to allow you on campus.

Have a great weekend!
The Coronavirus Planning Team

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[SHU Coronavirus Website](#) | [SHU Covid-19 Dashboard](#) | [If You Become Ill](#) | [Testing, Tracking, Treating & Tracing](#)

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