



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
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## Office of the President

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Dear students, faculty, and staff,

I'm writing with an update on our pandemic planning, its progression, and how it all impacts our mission.

The last time I wrote to you, I described our fall planning and efforts to track what is happening around the country. I have been following, along with many of you, how the rapid spread of COVID-19 has forced changes to campus plans at many higher education institutions that start classes earlier than we do. [UNC Chapel Hill](#) and [Notre Dame's](#) experiences have been widely covered and there are others who have or will change their plans as a result. [Michigan State](#), for example, has decided to transition from a hybrid course model to fully online and to not open their residence halls. Minimizing transmission of COVID-19 has proven to be a formidable challenge for many communities, including college campuses.

Our testing plan, [MTest](#), remains as the cornerstone to our mitigation efforts. We have anchored our plan in guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the advice of our own experts. Many of our peer institutions have done the same. However, as we have observed on other campuses, many testing protocols have not prevented large clusters that have forced wholesale adjustments for entire institutions.

On Wednesday, [Dr. Deborah Birx](#), the Coronavirus Response Coordinator for the White House Coronavirus Task Force, said that higher education

institutions should have the capacity to accomplish up to 10,000 tests per day. While this is not formal policy, it is a harbinger of what may come—and it does not align with our current plans. Our foremost priority continues to be your health and safety. Our mission means little if we place any member of our campus community in high-risk situations that could otherwise be mitigated. We are prepared to assume risks that we understand and can address, and we have created flexibility so that you can make individual choices about your own risk. But as we watch our peers and process this recommendation from Dr. Birx, we know that our plan must continue to adapt.

### **A Pivot for Fall 2020**

In order to adapt thoughtfully, I'm announcing the following proposal for consideration by the University's Board of Regents during a special meeting at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 24. This proposal is subject to the Board's review and approval.

For Crookston and Morris:

- **Move-in for University housing in Crookston will continue as scheduled, and on-campus Morris students should remain on campus.** Classes on both campuses will proceed as scheduled. Our approach is different here because of timing and because both campuses operate in communities where reported case numbers are lower than in other areas of Minnesota. We also believe the likelihood of widespread disease transmission to be lower on both campuses compared to our other campuses that have higher campus and community densities and more consistent traffic in and out of campus areas. Both campuses continue to work closely with our Health Emergency Response Office ([HERO](#)) and local and state public health officials. We are closely monitoring the situation with Chancellors Holz-Clause and Behr, and will continue to revisit our plans daily and consider any necessary adjustments to protect the

health and safety of these campuses. Watch your email closely for updates from your Chancellor.

For Duluth, Rochester, and the Twin Cities:

- **Move-in dates for University housing on all three campuses are postponed for at least two weeks** to provide additional time to evaluate new and emerging federal testing guidance, as well as continued evaluation of techniques used to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This window helps us avoid moving large numbers of students into on-campus housing and then moving them out again if public health conditions eventually require distance learning for the remainder of the fall semester. Students who plan to live in University residence halls or apartments will soon receive more information from the relevant office on your campus.
- **If University housing is your safest and best option, or if you are an international student with no other housing option, we will work with you to ensure you have a place to stay on campus.** Duluth, Rochester, and Twin Cities housing will remain open to students facing these challenges, much as it has for a small number of students during the spring and summer terms. Students should contact the housing office on their campus with concerns.
- **Undergraduate courses for all three campuses will proceed as scheduled, but will be wholly online for \*at least\* two weeks with some limited exceptions.** Prior to the start of the semester, students will be informed by their professors about how courses will change, if at all. After the Regents meeting next week, please contact your advisor or student success coach if you have questions or concerns about your schedule.
- **Graduate and professional students will continue with their schedule as communicated previously by their programs.** The population density of both groups of students is much less than undergraduates, providing a higher degree of protection from transmission. Please reach out to your advisor after next week's

Board meeting for more information. Remember to follow all applicable campus guidelines on facial coverings, physical distancing, and other personal hygiene measures to reduce viral transmission.

- **International students** with questions about requirements to maintain lawful status pursuant to their visa should contact [International Student and Scholar Services](#).
- **Students living off-campus on these three campuses should limit time on campus, if possible, to academic and personal health resources (e.g. libraries, Wifi connections, student wellness centers, etc.) and follow public health guidance about large gatherings, physical distancing, facial coverings, and basic precautions like hand-washing.** As you evaluate the impact of this news on your off-campus move-in plans, we draw your attention to this [guidance](#) from the MDH to help you stay safe and reduce pandemic spread. You are a key part of our ability to move ahead and we are counting on you.

On all campuses:

- **Student employees can and should continue to report for work unless otherwise directed by their manager.**
- **Faculty, researchers, and staff that have already been approved to be on campus through the Sunrise Plan can continue with their work. Any additional requests to return to campus should be made only if doing so is required to complete work. All other faculty and staff should continue working from home.** To our faculty and staff, I offer my sincerest appreciation. I know the around-the-clock work that has been done to prepare for this fall, and I regret, tremendously, that we are implementing even a temporary delay. I also recognize that in this uncertain time, it is challenging to have peace of mind and find a way forward that works as a parent and employee. I see the challenges you are facing as school starts, and the commitment and

balance you are striking between your work at the University and your time at home.

### **What Happens Next?**

Your actions during the coming weeks will significantly impact our ability to move forward. Please set a positive and meaningful example by wearing a face covering and [taking and following our community pledge](#). Physical distancing, washing your hands, staying home when sick, and avoiding gatherings really do matter. When we all work together, we can dramatically slow the spread of COVID-19 and improve our chances of returning to campus.

During this delay, we will review data against criteria for determining what adjustments, if any, are necessary to move forward. Specifically, we will examine:

- Case demographics: Number of new cases reported each week in college-aged individuals in the county or counties in which a campus is located (as available from public health partners), as well as overall case numbers in those counties. This will include all five of our campus locations.
- Availability of rapid testing capacity.
- Review of changing federal and state guidelines for colleges and universities, as well as our capacity to respond to those guidelines.
- Other campus and community responses: Assessing campus and community readiness for contact tracing support, isolation and quarantine, and medical support for cases based on new case totals.

This is not the message I had hoped to send, but we are learning from our peers and tracking the change in testing protocols—and we are seeing how both impact our commitment to safety.

We will present this proposal to the Board of Regents and it is subject to their approval, but we wanted to be transparent about our thinking and

maximize everyone's ability to adjust. [You can watch Monday's meeting online.](#) I will follow up with you when we have an approved plan in place.

Thank you for your patience. Please stay healthy, safe, and well.

With warmest wishes,

Joan Gabel

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