



# Interim Guidance for Higher Education COVID-19 Testing

[Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://Michigan.gov/Coronavirus)

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## Summary

Students at institutions of higher education have higher risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19, as evidenced in large outbreaks beginning in late summer 2020, including among students who lived off campus. To support prevention efforts, this guidance encourages institutions of higher education to require testing for students who live in the immediate university community, including students who may not live in campus housing or attend classes on campus. The guidance provides several examples of ways that schools may conduct testing with limited resources and supplies.

## Background

In late summer 2020, the return of in-person instruction on college campuses was associated with an increased incidence of COVID-19. [1] The increased incidence appears to have occurred largely as a result of social activities, rather than in-person instruction. For example, at one university where cases increased rapidly:

Transmission was likely facilitated by on- and off-campus congregate living settings and activities, with a majority of the gatherings (91%) and links between them (72%) associated with fraternities or sororities. Most patients reported virtual instruction only, which indicates transmission likely occurred primarily outside the classroom. [2; see also 3]

The social activities associated with increased COVID transmission in university communities may occur in settings over which the university does not exercise control. In Michigan, more than 180 identified cases of COVID were associated with gathering at a bar near a college campus. [4]

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends expanding asymptomatic testing for groups at heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19, including students at institutions of higher education. [5] Within its recommended framework, counties in Michigan currently qualify for at least weekly testing. The frequency of testing should increase in response to known outbreaks, particularly in groupings/settings with high potential for transmission, such as in a dormitory or other congregate living settings, among sports teams, or through social events. With the discovery of new, more transmissible variants, testing should be increased in areas/groupings

where people infected with new variants who may have exposed others. These situations can be evaluated with your local health department.

## Recommended Strategies

Because the COVID-19 virus does not distinguish between students living on and off campus, recommended testing strategies encompass the entire community setting. Recommended strategies also feature the use of mandates, in order to avoid the problem of students at greatest risk opting out from voluntary testing.

Recommended strategies include:

- Requiring weekly testing of all undergraduate students who reside on or near the campus and who participate in social activities associated with the campus community.
- As an alternative, if resources do not permit weekly testing of all students present in the campus community, require testing for all such students on a regular but random basis (for example, once per month). This is a recommended use of limited testing resources over more regular testing of a more limited group (for example, those who volunteer for testing, or those who live on campus in a campus community with a large off-campus component).
- Schools may choose to target limited testing resources for mandatory testing based on information about community spread, including information from wastewater testing. However, it is critical that information about spread reach all areas of the university community where significant numbers of students live.
- Where incidence is low, universities may utilize pooled testing in order reach a larger number of students.

The bounds of the university community will vary, but generally include a surrounding area with a significant concentration of students who socialize on or near the campus. Residential fraternities and sororities would be included. A student could be required to complete an affirmation about where they reside. Not completing the affirmation, completing it falsely, or not completing required testing if applicable could be treated as a violation of the school's honor code or otherwise subject to consequences.

Note that whatever testing strategy is utilized, results should lead to specific actions such as immediate isolation of those with a positive test or symptoms and exposure to someone with a positive test (i.e., a case), robust contact tracing of roommates, classmates, and social contacts once a case is identified, quarantining [close contacts of cases](#), and reviewing and altering infection prevention and control practices and implemented mitigation strategies.

By engaging in the best-practice strategies above, schools can minimize the risk of outbreaks, and in so doing, minimize the risk of future closures and exposure of family members after closures occur.