

**To:** Institutions of Higher Education  
**From:** New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education,  
New Jersey Department of Health  
**Date:** September 17, 2025  
**Subject:** Brief on Communicable Disease Preparedness and Response Needs in Higher  
Education Settings

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The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Communicable Disease Service conducted its first statewide communicable disease preparedness needs assessment with institutions of higher education in spring of 2024. The findings from this assessment are provided in the attached brief.

The assessment highlights communicable disease preparedness level, response plans, and partnerships. The brief concludes with recommendations to enhance IHEs' ability to respond to communicable diseases, including partnering with your local health department, requesting free communicable disease training, reviewing reporting requirements and signing up for the NJ DOH New Jersey Local Information Network and Communication System (NJLINCS). Institutions are encouraged to share and review this information with relevant stakeholders, including institutional leadership, health centers, and those involved in emergency operation plans.

For additional information and resources regarding this topic, please visit the [NJDOH Communicable Disease Service website](https://www.nj.gov/health/doh/njlincs/).

## Communicable Disease Preparedness and Response Needs Assessment in Higher Education Settings

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Communicable Disease Service (CDS) conducted its first statewide communicable disease preparedness needs assessment for degree granting institutions of higher education (IHEs) between April and May of 2024. The survey collected data from campuses regarding their current communicable disease preparedness policies and practices.

### Response Rate

- A total of 53 (66%) survey responses were received, representing 61 (68%) campuses across the state.
- Average response rate of 74.8% was reported for all institution types, with less representation of Proprietary and Religious/Talmudic/Theological institutions.
- Similarly, average response rate of 86% was observed across enrollment sizes categories, with less representation of institutions that has less than 2,500 enrolled Students.
- Respondents held various roles across different departments such as Health & Wellness staff (30%), Student Affairs & Enrollment staff (28%), Campus Safety & Operations staff (13%) and campus leadership and Executive staff (11%).
- Both complete 47 (89%) and partial 6 (11%) responses were included in this report.

### Overall Communicable Disease Preparedness Level

The majority of respondents (**86%**) reported that their institution is overall either well prepared or substantially prepared to respond to cases or outbreaks of communicable diseases.



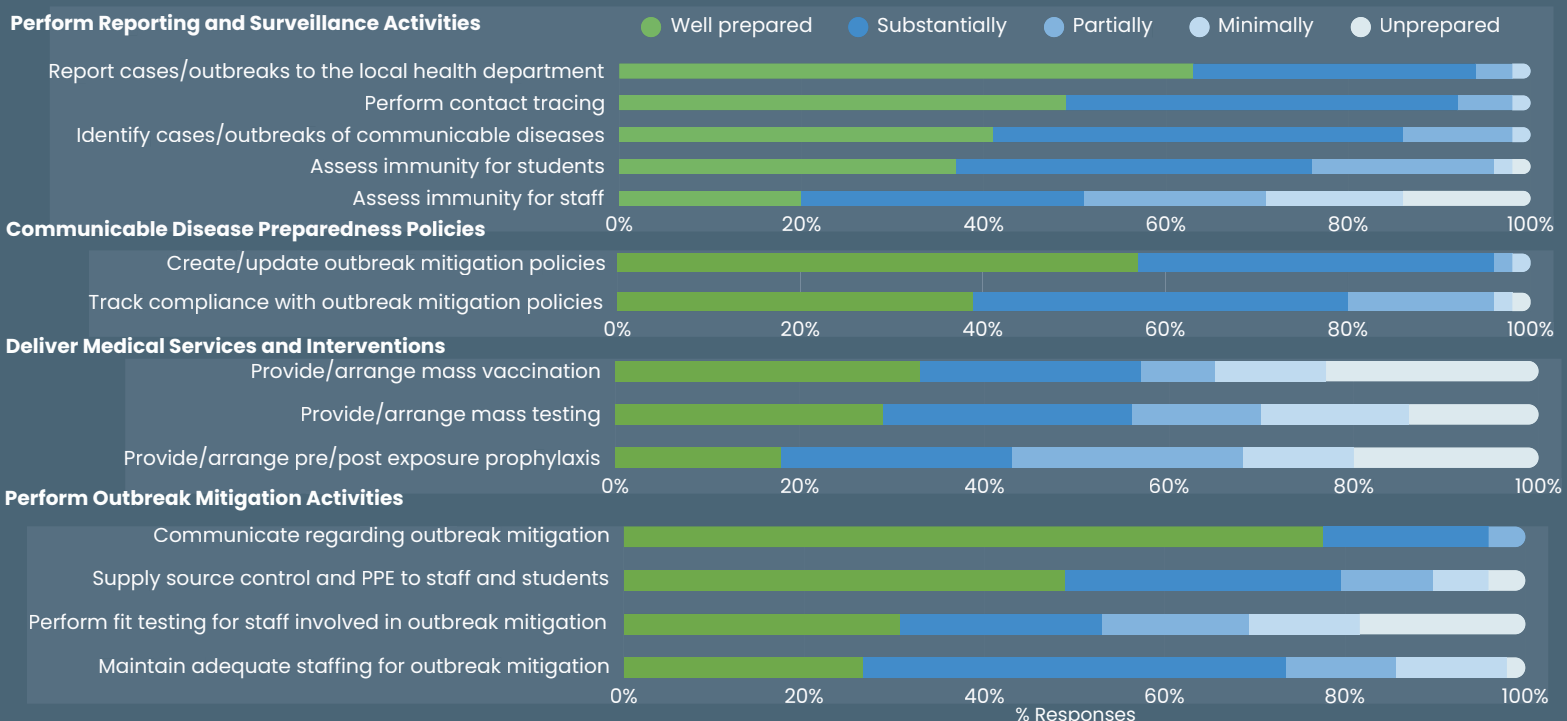
of respondents from **4-year** institutions reported that their institution is well prepared.



of respondents from **2-year** institutions reported that their institution is well prepared.

When respondents were asked to share input regarding the **challenges and resources** needed to enhance their institutions' overall preparedness, lack of staffing, limited financial resources, and other resources necessary to perform mass vaccination and testing and stockpiling PPE supplies were the most highlighted.

### Communicable Disease Preparedness Level to Perform Preparedness Activities





30%



of institutions that have Greek Life organizations reported that they are well prepared to enforce outbreak mitigation policies for these organizations.



## Communicable Disease Response Plan

All IHEs in NJ are required to have an emergency operation plan that addresses all potential emergencies, including pandemics, as per NJ Statute Title 18A – Education Section 18A:3B-69 (2024).

82%

of respondents felt that their communicable disease preparedness plan is **ready to be activated**.



Update the plan at least once per year



Collaborate with other institutions regarding the plan at least once per year



Test the plan at least once per year (e.g., conduct drills, simulations, etc.)

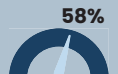
## Isolation and Quarantine

The survey sought to identify current capacity, such as designated space, and the ability to provide essential services during isolation and quarantine. Most residential campuses that responded to the survey have limited designated space (3-5 rooms) (64%), others reported having large designated isolation areas (building or floor) (22%), and the remaining reported no designated area or current plans (14%).

### Level of Confidence of Residential Campuses to Provide Essential Services During Isolation and Quarantine



feel completely confident in providing meals to students who cannot leave their isolation or quarantine room.



feel completely confident in cleaning and disinfecting all areas that infected students visited.



feel completely confident in providing emergency maintenance to rooms with infected students.



feel completely confident in providing separate bathrooms for infected students.



feel completely confident in providing laundry services to students who may have contaminated clothing.



## How College Students in NJ Receive Their Health Care Needs

45% reported that students rely on **the campus health center**.

43% reported that students access healthcare through **a local health care provider who is not partnered with their institution**.

4% reported that students accessing health services through a **federally qualified health clinic (FHQC) or health care provider who is partnered with their institution**.



## Health Insurance Policy Requirements

44% of respondents report that their institution **does not require** students to have health insurance plan that provides coverage in NJ.

## Respondents Perceived Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on NJ College Students



90% strongly agree/agree that their students experienced mental health struggles.



79% strongly agree/agree that their students experienced food and housing instability.



73% strongly agree/agree that their students experienced poor academic performance.

## Communicable Disease Training Needs

**85%** reported a **high** or **very high** need for training on at least one topic related to communicable disease management.

When respondents were asked about the preferred modality for educational resources, fact sheets and printed materials (62%) and asynchronous virtual training (48%) were highly preferred among other modalities.

### IHEs Report Interest in Communicable Disease Training for The Following Groups: (n=47)



**(93%)**  
Students



**(88%)**  
Administrative staff



**(85%)**  
Teaching staff



**(83%)**  
Custodial staff



**(80%)**  
Health staff



reported a moderate to high or very high need for training on **general outbreak management**.



reported a moderate to high or very high need for training on **vaccine-preventable disease and dermatologic illness**.



reported a moderate to high or very high need for training on **outbreak management in athletes and sports groups**.

## Partnership with Local Health Departments (LHDs)

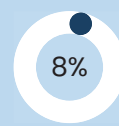
LHDs are the first line of defense and play an integral role in emergency preparedness and response in the community. The survey asked about important aspects of partnership between IHEs and LHDs to enhance future collaboration.



reported that their institutions have contact information for their LHD, including after-hours and holidays.



reported that their institutions have consulted with LHD regarding an outbreak or cases of communicable disease in the past.



reported that their institutions collaborated with LHD to conduct drills or other communicable disease preparedness activities in the past year.

## Recommendations

Enhancing IHEs' ability to respond to communicable diseases requires a multilayered approach that includes refining current practices and policies and continuous collaborations between IHEs and local public health. While refining current practices and policies, IHEs should consider how they will rapidly assess immunization statuses of students and staff and deliver medical services and interventions if needed. Additionally, residential IHEs should collaborate with local public health to discuss how they can confidently provide essential services during isolation and quarantine. NJDOH-CDS and LHDs will continue proactively contacting IHEs and providing tailored support and training based on these results and emerging needs.



Partnerships with your **local health department** are crucial to enhance preparedness.

Request free communicable disease training by emailing NJDOH at:  
[cds.rep.communications@doh.nj.gov](mailto:cds.rep.communications@doh.nj.gov).

The NJDOH quick reference guide for **communicable disease reporting requirements** is available online for review.

NJDOH's New Jersey Local Information Network and Communication System (**NJLINCS**) offers public health updates and messages for those who sign up.

