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COVID-19: A Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education UPDATED: March 17, 2020

As New Jersey continues to monitor the evolving outbreak of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its impact on communities, guidance will continue to be published and updated on the New Jersey Department of Health's webpage: [NJDOH's COVID-19 Information for Schools and Businesses](https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schoolbusiness.shtml) available at https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_schoolbusiness.shtml. This supplementary guidance provided by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) is intended to help institutions plan and prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks and potential for a confirmed on-campus case.

- **Immediate action steps.**

- Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 104](#), issued by Governor Murphy on March 16, 2020, institutions of higher education shall cease in-person instruction beginning on Wednesday, March 18, 2020 and shall cease such in-person instruction as long as Executive Order No. 104 remains in effect.
- In addition, Executive Order No. 104 limits all gatherings of persons in the State of New Jersey to 50 persons or fewer, excluding normal operations at airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, office environments, factories, assemblages for the purpose of industrial or manufacturing work, construction sites, mass transit, or the purchase of groceries or consumer goods. Accordingly, institutions should take steps to limit the size of all gatherings at the institution to 50 persons or fewer.
- Institutions should transition to remote instruction immediately if they have not done so already;
- Institutions should limit in-person interaction on campus as much as possible. This includes:
 - Limiting in-person gatherings of students, faculty, or staff,
 - Discouraging communal dining and moving to “grab-and-go” meal options,
 - Restricting access to community gathering places, such as athletic facilities, student centers, campus commons, theaters, art galleries, and other such areas; and
 - Moving to telework and remote work environments for as many employees and staff as possible,
- Institutions should convene their emergency management team immediately, if they have not already done so, and the teams should continue to meet on an ongoing regular basis.
- Each team should be reviewing, updating, and implementing the institution’s Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). As part of this process, institutions should:
 - Assess whether their EOP is sufficient to address the COVID-19 situation as it evolves.
 - As a reminder, [N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69\(a\)\(1\)](#) specifically requires that the EOP addresses pandemics;
 - Institutions should be implementing remote learning, including making accommodations for those who lack access to either the technology or broadband internet needed to participate in online instruction and making accommodations for students with disabilities;

- Implement plans to include considerations for students who are already be food or housing insecure and who may suffer a disproportionate impact from the evolving situation;
 - Review and implement plans for the continuity of business and operations at the institution.
- **Updating EOPs.**
 - N.J.S.A. 18A:3B-69 requires each institution to update the EOP once every five years or immediately when an emergency incident occurs at an institution.
 - Institutions should provide the most recently updated EOP for the institution to OSHE for review by March 15, 2020 via email at OSHE@oshe.nj.gov. If institutions have not submitted their EOPs, they should do so as soon as possible.
 - OSHE will review each EOP in consultation with the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, the State Office of Emergency Management, and the New Jersey Department of Health.
- **Recommended Best Practices.**
 - Institutions should contact local health agencies in order to provide the institution's EOP to the local health agencies.
 - Institutions can visit the [DOH's interactive local health directory map](https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/community/index.shtml) to determine the local health authority within your jurisdiction. The interactive map is available at <https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/community/index.shtml>.
 - Institutional leadership should monitor daily the [New Jersey Department of Health](#), [Centers for Disease Control](#), U.S. Department of Education (<https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>), and [World Health Organization](#) websites in order to obtain the most up-to-date information on this rapidly evolving situation.
 - Institutions should postpone or cancel study abroad programs.
 - Institutions should be flexible in making accommodations for students and employees who may be subject to quarantine.
 - Institutions should commit to raising awareness of the facts surrounding COVID-19 and to prevent stigmas related to COVID-19 from manifesting in their communities. The CDC maintains a useful webpage with information about the potential stigma related to the coronavirus at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>.
 - Institutions should include a 'Coronavirus Update' section on their websites to help ensure that stakeholders are receiving factual information from the institution and that institutions are being transparent in regard to all coronavirus-related actions taken. Regular updates to the campus community should be provided by the institution on a regular basis. General information that may be useful in regard to Coronavirus Update can be found on the NJDOH webpage at:
https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_community.shtml

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available. Institutions should continue to coordinate with federal, state and local officials as they develop preparations and plans for this rapidly evolving situation.

For additional clarification on potential questions related to New Jersey's COVID-19 outbreak, please review the following:

- NEW information/questions are at the start of this document.
- A resource guide is provided at conclusion of document

Is it possible for classes with clinical or lab work components to be moved online?

For students in clinical rotations, institutions should consider placements and experiences that are safe, allow for social distancing, and are coordinated with [New Jersey Department of Health guidelines for general clinical safety](#). For lab work, institutions should consider virtual methods of instruction, including but not limited to virtual simulation activities. Institutions should postpone lab work or clinical activities if a safe, appropriate educational alternative cannot be implemented.

On March 16, 2020 Governor Murphy ordered that all institutions of higher education shall cease in-person instruction beginning on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, and shall cease such in-person instruction as long as the Governor's order remains in effect. The Governor further ordered that Secretary of the Office of Higher Education shall have the authority to grant a waiver to allow in-person instruction to students on a case-by-case basis where a compelling rationale to allow such access exists. If an institution would like to seek a waiver from the Secretary to continue with in-person instruction, please contact oshe@oshe.nj.gov for more information on how to obtain a waiver.

The full text of Executive Order No. 104 can be found at <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-104.pdf>.

How will the institution accommodate students with disabilities who may not be able to access virtual instructional materials, such as videos or other resources?

Institutions must ensure equitable access to remote instruction is made available to students with disabilities, in accordance with all state and federal laws regarding individuals with disability. Students with disabilities should be provided accommodations allowing for the completion of all coursework as institutions move to remote instruction. Institutions should work to provide such accommodations in consultation with their office responsible for student disability services. Faculty should be supported by the institution in developing course adaptations or accommodations as they transition online or remote instruction in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Institutions should make certain that all course materials are accessible to students with disabilities, including but not limited to ensuring: documents compatibility with screen readers, the use of closed captioning in videos, student participation in online video discussions, and the appropriate accommodations required for testing. Students with disabilities should be provided with the contact information for the office within the institution that is responsible for student disability services and encouraged by the institution to contact that office if accommodations or other assistance may be needed.

Will the institution issue refunds for housing, unused food plans, courses, and other select fees?

Institution should have a refund policy in place that they communicate with students as soon as is practicable, but before the end of the academic term. Guidance from the US Department of Education (ED) regarding federal financial aid refund policy and other considerations for institutions of higher education regarding COVID-19 related interruptions to study can be found here: <https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>

Should athletic programming continue?

In-person athletic programs where 50 or more persons might gather should be postponed or canceled until further notice. OSHE also recommends that every in-person athletic program, regardless of the number of potential participants, be postponed or canceled until further notice.

Should institutions continue recruitment efforts, such as having prospective students visit the campus?

These activities should either be cancelled, postponed until further notice, or continued through an alternate (e.g. virtual) format.

How should the institution handle dual enrollment student participation?

Institutions should take action in alignment with their partnership agreements so that dual enrollment students are offered an opportunity to complete coursework via distance education. OSHE recommends that all in-person classes be provided via remote instruction or postponed until further notice.

Should institutions cancel planned commencement ceremonies?

As this is a rapidly evolving situation, institutions should consider monitoring federal, state and local guidance regarding the holding of large events. On March 16, 2020 Governor Murphy has ordered that all gatherings of persons in the State of New Jersey shall be limited to 50 persons or fewer, excluding normal operations at airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, office environments, factories, assemblages for the purpose of industrial or manufacturing work, construction sites, mass transit, or the purchase of groceries or consumer goods.

Accordingly, institutions may want to consider developing alternate plans in the event that Governor Murphy's order continues through the institution's planned date for commencement.

How will student organizations, such as student government or other clubs and groups, continue to convene?

OSHE recommends that all in-person meetings that were originally scheduled to occur on campus be conducted virtually, if possible.

Should the institution cancel all of our events on campus?

The Governor ordered that all gatherings of persons in the State of New Jersey shall be limited to 50 persons or fewer, excluding normal operations at airports, bus and train stations, medical facilities, office environments, factories, assemblages for the purpose of industrial or manufacturing work, construction sites, mass transit, or the purchase of groceries or consumer goods.

These measures are being taken as part of the Murphy Administration's coordinated response to the continued outbreak and to aggressively mitigate the spread of the virus. Institutions should consider hosting events and meetings virtually or remotely, to the extent possible. Additionally, for any event or meeting, no matter the size, OSHE recommends that the institution encourage and facilitate responsible hygiene practices by all attendees, such as washing hands routinely, staying home if you do not feel well, and keeping a six-foot minimum distance from other attendee.

What is the guidance for institutions regarding employees working on campus?

Institutions should institute a telecommuting or remote work policy where possible. For employees that still need to come to campus to perform their essential duties, institutions should limit large gatherings and encourage social distancing practices, such as convening meetings via conference call.

How should universities handle complaints, conduct hearings, adjudications, investigations, and other university policy-related proceedings during a school closure or transition to distance learning?

Institutions should consider ways to conduct any in-person activities virtually, while maintaining compliance with all federal and/or state laws, including timely notifications about hearings to stakeholders involved. Students, faculty, and staff should have clear instructions on how to report or submit formal complaints (i.e. Title IX violations) during a school closure.

Following from previous guidance issued on March 11, 2020, please see potential questions related to New Jersey's COVID-19 outbreak:

How should institutions of higher education prepare for the coronavirus?

The emergency management teams at each institution should be meeting regularly to discuss, implement and update the EOP. Each plan should include the identification of essential functions, programs, and personnel;

procedures to implement the plan; delegation of authority; crisis communications protocols and identification of alternative facilities and related infrastructure.

How should an institution address possible material hardships that students might face as a result of that institution's closing?

OSHE recommends that institutions implement plans for appropriate, alternative accommodations for students that either use the institution's campus as their primary residence or who cannot easily return home in the event of a campus shutdown. As part of this planning and preparation, institutions should consider options for making the campus accessible to students who do not have another residence. Institutions should also consider either preparing campus food pantries or working with local community food pantries to help food-insecure students locate food sources.

I heard that the Governor has declared a State of Emergency. What does that mean?

On March 9, 2020, Governor Phil Murphy declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency to contain the spread of COVID-19. Executive Order No. 103 declares a state of emergency and public health emergency across all of New Jersey, and allows state agencies and departments to utilize state resources to assist affected communities responding to and recovering from COVID-19 cases. The declaration tasks the State Director of Emergency Management and Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police, in conjunction with New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner to oversee the implementation of the State's EOP and generally direct the State's emergency response.

Additionally, the declaration triggers other executive powers and safeguards, such as prohibiting excessive price increases pursuant to New Jersey's Consumer Fraud Act and the ability to relax certain State procurement procedures to expedite the delivery of goods and services necessary for coronavirus preparedness and response efforts.

Governor Murphy's emergency declaration also empowers all State agencies, specifically the Departments of Banking and Insurance, Health, Human Services, and the Civil Service Commission to take all appropriate steps to address the public health hazard of COVID-19.

The full text of Executive Order No. 103 can be found at <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-103.pdf>.

The Governor released travel directives restricting state travel. Does this extend to employees at public institutions of higher education?

The travel directives, which restrict international and domestic travel, apply only to executive branch agencies. However, public institutions of higher education should continue to monitor the guidance provided by the DOH, CDC and WHO in formulating travel guidelines. Institutions should consider limiting all non-essential travel, both domestically and internationally.

Any person or group planning a trip abroad should consult the CDC's travel website for current advisories regarding any travel restrictions. The situation is rapidly evolving so travelers should stay up to date with CDC's travel health notices related to this outbreak at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. The CDC has announced that these notices will be updated as more information becomes available.

In regard to travel, what should we be doing for our study abroad programs?

Institutions should postpone or cancel all study abroad programs and assist students in their return home. Students returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance they have received from health officials as referenced below under **"If a student or staff member recently returned**

from a level 3 country in the past 14 days..." COVID-19 information for travel is updated regularly on the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

What should we do about students traveling for spring break?

The most recent state and federal guidance suggests postponing all non-essential travel both domestic and international. Institutions should advise all students to consider the potential risks that may be involved in visiting a destination, including the risk of transmission as well as the possibility of quarantine upon return. Students should also be made aware that destinations where any sustained community transmission has been identified should be avoided. Institutions should advise students that may be planning to travel outside of the United States to consult the CDC website for current travel advisories regarding any restrictions on travel and that they can obtain current information about travel health notices from the CDC related to this outbreak at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

If a student or staff member recently returned from a level 3 country in the past 14 days, should they be excluded from work or school?

There are now several countries identified by the CDC as level 3 (i.e. countries experiencing ongoing, sustained community transmission of COVID-19). The CDC has issued travel advisories for level 3 countries at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>. Students and staff returning from level 3 countries should follow all guidance provided by CDC at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>.

What should an institution do if a student or staff member presents with symptoms of COVID-19?

Institutions should encourage students or employees who exhibit signs of illness to return home and stay home. In light of the urgency around this rapidly evolving situation, DOH recommends that institutions suspend any requirement for students to obtain a doctor's note in order to be excused from class.

Institutions should provide flexibility and assistance to ensure that employees and students can fully comply with isolation or quarantine orders.

If a student's primary residence is campus housing and they are under quarantine (self-quarantine or quarantine order), what facilities should be provided?

In the event that a student is quarantined in a residence hall on campus with a single, private room with access to a private bathroom, the student may be able to quarantine in place. In addition, the CDC has approved the use of hotels and motels for quarantine. OSHE recommends that institutions consult with local health department in their community to obtain advice and recommendations on options for potential quarantine locations.

If my institution must utilize online programs or distance education to maintain continuity of instruction, will additional approval from OSHE or the Presidents' Council be required? Would additional approval from accrediting bodies be required?

Institutions do not need to obtain any additional approvals from OSHE or the Presidents' Council to offer currently approved academic programs in an online or distance education format. In regard to accreditation requirements, the U.S. Department of Education is permitting accreditors to waive their distance education review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of COVID-19. See this announcement for more information:

<https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>.

However, your institution should consult with the applicable accreditors in regard to institutional and programmatic requirements for the use of distance education.

In addition, OSHE strongly recommends that your institution join NC-SARA if your institution is not currently a member of NC-SARA and there is a possibility that your institution may be offering distance education programs to students while they are located outside of New Jersey. NC-SARA membership will allow your

institution to seamlessly offer distance education to students in every state except for California, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Please contact Eric Taylor at eric.taylor@oshe.nj.gov for more information.

Does the requirement for my institution to report incidents per the Clery Act continue to apply when students are temporarily residing off-campus in facilities provided by my institution, such as a hotel, and if so, when does that reporting requirement begin to apply?

Yes, institutions of higher education that are subject to the Clery Act's reporting requirements must continue to disclose campus security information even while students are temporarily residing off-campus in facilities provided by the institution. The reporting requirement begins to apply immediately for any such period of temporary residence by a student. For more detailed information, see [The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting \(2016 Edition\)](https://clerycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/handbook-2.pdf) <https://clerycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/handbook-2.pdf>.

Additional FAQs regarding the Clery Act are available here: <https://clerycenter.org/article/covid-19-clery-act-faqs/>

What should an institution do if a student disobeys a quarantine order?

Please contact the local health department in your community if you believe a quarantine order is needed, or if someone has violated a quarantine order already in place.

Are there cleaning protocols for COVID-19 that institutions should be aware of?

Special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended by NJ Department of Health (DOH) to slow the spread of respiratory illness. Schools should follow standard procedures for routine cleaning and disinfecting with an EPA-registered product. Typically, this means daily sanitizing surfaces and objects that are touched often, such as desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

DOH also recommends that employers increase education on respiratory hygiene. DOH recommends preventing transmission of respiratory infections by taking the following steps:

- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Washing hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Staying home from work if you are sick.
- Avoiding people who are sick.
- Getting a flu shot – it is not too late to be protected.

Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects.

How can institutions reduce fear and anxiety during this public health emergency?

In recognition that public health emergencies can cause panic, it is important that institutions focus on sharing only established facts with their community members. Raising awareness about the issue should be done quickly, accurately, and transparently. Institutions should abide by rules of privacy and confidentiality in dealing with any individuals on their campus who may be a patient. Institutions should continue to direct their stakeholders to mental health resources available within the community. Institutions should commit to reducing stigmatization of groups or individuals related to COVID-19. Additional guidance regarding stigma and resilience is available on the CDC website here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/related-stigma.html>.

How can I help share facts and resources with higher education stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students?

Institutions should consider including a direct link to COVID-19 resources on their institutional homepage, so that it is readily available for stakeholders. The CDC has provided several resources

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>) that can be printed and shared in public areas, shared on social media or distributed via email. These resources currently include posters detailing: facts about COVID-19, what to do if you are sick, how to stop the spread of germs, and how to properly wash your hands. There are also videos and a public health image library available. In addition, the DOH and OSHE will continue to post updates on their social media pages, which can be shared with stakeholders. CDC resources are available here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>.

What if I still have questions?

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available from DOH, CDC and WHO. For health-related COVID-19 questions, please call the hotline run by the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) at 1-800-222-1222. If you are using an out-of-state phone line, please call 1-800-962-1253. You can also email DOH subject matter experts at ncov@doh.nj.gov with questions. Institutions can also continue to reach out to OSHE at O.OSHE@oshe.nj.gov.

Please follow OSHE on Twitter at [@NJIHigherEd](#) and DOH on [Twitter](#) @njdeptofhealth, [Facebook](#) /njdeptofhealth, [Instagram](#) @njdeptofhealth and [Snapchat](#) @njdoh for updates. OSHE has also added a direct link to our homepage for COVID-19 updates: <https://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/>.

For additional information and guidance, please see the suggested resources below. The views expressed in these resources do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the State of New Jersey. The content provided is intended to serve as a resource and is provided in good faith.

COVID-2019 Resources

- **Governor Murphy**
 - Twitter [@GovMurphy](#)
 - Twitter [@NJGov](#)
- **Office of the Secretary of Higher Education**
 - Guidance for Institutions of Higher Education -
https://nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/index/COVID-19_A%20Guide%20for%20New%20Jersey%20Institutions%20of%20Higher%20Education.pdf
 - Twitter [@NJIHigherEd](#)
- **NJ Department of Health** - <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>
1-800-222-1222 or 1-800-962-1253 if using out-of-state phone line
 - Novel Coronavirus COVID-2019 - <https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml>
 - School Health - <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/schoolhealth.shtml>
 - School Exclusion List -
https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/outbreaks/School%20Exclusion%20List_9.2018.pdf
 - Social Media:
 - [Twitter](#) @njdeptofhealth
 - [Facebook](#) /njdeptofhealth
 - [Instagram](#)@njdeptofhealth

- [Snapchat](#) @njdoh
- NJ COVID-19 Dashboard - https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019_dashboard.shtml
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** - <https://www.cdc.gov/>
 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>
 - Resources for Institutes of Higher Education - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html>
 - Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
 - Travelers from Countries with Widespread Sustained (Ongoing) Transmission Arriving in the United States - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>
 - Home Isolation Guide – <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-home-care.html>
 - Nonpharmaceutical Interventions - <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html>
 - Twitter [@CDCgov](#)
- **World Health Organization (WHO)** - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
 - World Health Organization [@WHO](#)
- **Local Health Department Directory** - www.localhealth.nj.gov
- **NJ Office of Emergency Management**
 - Twitter [@ReadyNJ](#)
- **US Department of Education**
 - <https://www.ed.gov/coronavirus>
 - Twitter [@usedgov](#)
- **American College Health Association** -
https://wwwacha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Preparing_for_COVID-19_March-3-2020.pdf
- **State Higher Education Executive Officers Associations (SHEEO)** - <https://sheeo.org/covid-19-state-plans/>
- **Middle States Commission on Higher Education** - <https://www.msche.org/covid-19/>