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COVID-19: A Guide for New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education UPDATED: May 15, 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 (DOH)'s webpage: [DOH's COVID-19 Information for Schools](#). This supplementary guidance provided by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) is intended to help institutions navigate and respond to this unprecedented public health emergency. It is intended to be supplementary to OSHE guidance issued on [March 26, 2020](#) and [April 21, 2020](#).

- **Immediate action steps.**

- Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 107](#) (which supersedes EO 104), issued by Governor Murphy on March 21, 2020, institutions of higher education shall continue to cease in-person instruction as long as Executive Order No. 107 remains in effect.
- In addition, Executive Order No. 107 cancels all gatherings of persons in the State of New Jersey unless otherwise authorized by EO No. 107, 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.
- Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 109](#), any institution of higher education in possession of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), ventilators, respirators or anesthesia machines that are not required for the provision of critical health care services should have documented their equipment inventory.
 - Institutions can document their inventory by visiting [covid19.nj.gov/ppereport](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppereport).
 - Anyone who has PPE they wish to donate can visit [covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations](https://www.covid19.nj.gov/ppedonations).
- Institutions must transition to remote instruction immediately if they have not done so already, unless they have been granted an OSHE [waiver](#).
 - DOH has developed a [Checklist for Health Considerations for Waiver Requests](#).
- Institutions should limit in-person interaction on campus as much as possible. This includes:
 - Immediately closing all libraries and computer labs,
 - 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;
 - Implement 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 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 their EOP once every five years or immediately when an emergency incident occurs at an institution.
 - Institutions should have provided the most recently updated EOP for the institution to OSHE for review by March 15, 2020. If institutions have not submitted their EOPs, they should do so as soon as possible. As institutions update their EOPs, they should continue to send their most up-to-date EOPs to OSHE.
 - OSHE reviewed each EOP in consultation with the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (OHSP), the State Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and DOH.
 - OSHE sent feedback letters to institutions with suggestions on how EOPs can be strengthened to improve their response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Recommended Best Practices.**
 - Institutions should contact local health agencies and county emergency management office in order to provide their EOP.
 - Institutions can visit the [DOH's interactive local health directory map](#) to determine the local health authority within their jurisdiction.
 - Institutions can visit the [State Office of Emergency Management website](#) to determine their county coordinator.
 - Institutional leadership should monitor daily the [New Jersey Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control](#), [U.S. Department of Education](#), 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.
 - In order to support the efforts of institutions of higher education in responding to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, OSHE developed a [COVID-19 Website Resource Guide](#) with recommendations on best practices for informational websites.
 - While circumstances may differ from one institution to another, all institutions should provide factual, up-to-date information to their respective campus communities regarding their COVID-19 response.
 - A centralized COVID-19 website or webpage is successful when serving as a regularly updated “one-stop” information center for current and prospective students, faculty, staff, and families.
 - It is especially effective to address frequently asked questions, as well as to tailor specific information and resources to different stakeholders.

OSHE will continue to share updated guidance and information as it becomes available. *OSHE also created a COVID-19 resource webpage available at <https://nj.gov/highereducation/COVID-19.shtml>.*

Institutions should continue to coordinate with federal, state and local officials as they develop 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/UPDATED information/questions are highlighted in yellow.

How can institutions provide support to undocumented and international students during COVID?

(NEW)

The US Department of Education issued Frequently Asked Questions on April 21, 2020, which stated that student aid from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund of the federal CARES Act only applies to Title IV eligible students. To support students who are ineligible to receive these funds, institutions should consider using private or fundraised funds to create emergency aid grant programs for these students. Institutions can also make internal and external resources available for this population by creating a webpage with up-to-date information notifying students of potential alternatives to funding and community resources, contacting students via email, and hosting virtual drop-in hours.

In addition, the State has a collection of resources available for New Jersey residents regardless of their immigration status on the [COVID Information Hub](#). This site includes resources and information on: health care coverage; special relief programs; and immigration policy and enforcement.

As the Governor begins to talk about restarting the New Jersey economy, how will this impact higher education? (NEW)

OSHE will continue to partner with institutions across the state and follow the principles outlined in the Governor's vision: "[The Road Back: Restoring Economic Health through Public Health](#)," which details key metrics that will be used to guide the recovery and restoration of New Jersey's economy.

Additionally, OSHE will lead New Jersey's Higher Education Restart Advisory Group (HERAG), with the purpose of providing input on recovery considerations specific to higher education. However, Executive Order 107 remains in effect until further notice. Additionally, Governor Murphy on May 6, 2020 [extended the public health emergency declaration](#) by 30 days. The operating status of an institution will be guided by state Orders that will be informed by the continuous monitoring of health data, the implementation of the recovery plan, and any corresponding guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all New Jersey residents, including our students, staff, faculty, and leadership.

What should institutions do regarding college deposit deadlines for new incoming students? (NEW)

Institutions may want to practice flexibility in terms of college deposit deadlines. Recognizing the hardships that students are currently facing, some practices institutions can adopt include pushing the deposit deadline to a later date, providing waivers for students with demonstrated need or on a case-by-case basis, reducing the deposit amount for all students/select populations, or waiving the deposit entirely for all students/select populations.

What support is being provided to students who may be unable to make payments towards their student loans? (NEW)

The federal CARES Act provides relief for students with federal loans by suspending monthly payments, interest and involuntary collection activity until September 30, 2020, however students can still make payments if they choose. For more information about federal student loans, visit the [US Department of Education website](#).

In addition, the Higher Education Student Assistant Authority (HESAA) is committed to helping borrowers with loans through the New Jersey College Loans to Assist State Students (NJCLASS) program. HESAA is offering several repayment relief options for those who may be experiencing a reduction in income due to the pandemic. HESAA has created a reference guide on the NJCLASS Family Loans at https://www.hesaa.org/Documents/Misc/NJCLASS_Q_n_A.pdf.

Furthermore, on April 21, 2020, Governor Murphy and Department of Banking and Insurance Commissioner Marlene Caride announced certain relief options for students utilizing private student loan services. For the list of the private student loan services providing relief, [view the full press release](#).

How can we help with the state response? What can we do or who should we reach out to? (Updated)

Institutions have volunteered to assist with the COVID-19 response in their communities and across the state. In addition, State agencies may reach out to institutions to serve as testing sites, etc. (A map of testing sites is available [here](#).)

The State is also in need of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical equipment for the healthcare workers and first responders that are on the front lines fighting this pandemic. Pursuant to [Executive Order No. 109](#), any institution of higher education in possession of PPE, ventilators, respirators or anesthesia machines that are not required for the provision of critical health care services should have documented their equipment inventory with the state. If your institution has not done so already, it can document its inventory with the State by visiting covid19.nj.gov/ppereport.

Institutions can also donate to their communities by contacting their [local office of emergency management](#). Individuals at institutions who are interested in donating supplies, can be directed to covid19.nj.gov/forms/ppedonations and should be advised to please check this form periodically in case the list of necessary items gets updated.

The State also needs the help of qualified health, mental health and related professionals to supplement New Jersey's health care capacity on a temporary basis. Individuals who are willing and able to support the State's response to the COVID-19 outbreak can visit covid19.nj.gov/forms/volunteer. A state representative will reach out with more details to pair individuals' skillsets with unmet needs. There are also two programs in which students can contribute to COVID-19 response efforts through the health care workforce. Those include the [emergency graduate licensure program](#) for recent graduates who have not yet been able to take their licensing exams and the [NJ Student Nurse Strong Initiative](#) for volunteer student nurses.

The State also welcomes offers of assistance from technology professionals and firms looking to help in the fight against COVID-19. A [Tech Talent portal](#) is available for people with experience in a variety of technological areas to provide support.

Institutions should also consider providing any remaining unused food resources to local pantries. The State also launched a new webpage for volunteers. There is an immediate need for volunteers to help deliver meals to elderly or otherwise vulnerable residents as well as for volunteers to assist at food pantries. Visit <http://covid19.nj.gov/help> and click on "Volunteer in Your Community."

Are there mental health resources available to students, staff and faculty during this time? (Updated)

We recognize this is a time of high anxiety and change for students, staff and faculty. For concerns in regard to mental health, the State is offering a free helpline available through the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) that offers telephone counseling, emotional support, information and assistance. The helpline is available seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at 866-202-HELP (4357). DHS is also offering emotional help and support hearing impaired individuals during COVID-19.

In addition, the St. Joseph's Health's ACCESS Program, with support from DHS, is offering a free emotional support helpline in American Sign Language to deaf and hard of hearing New Jerseyans regarding COVID-19 related anxieties. The confidential videophone helpline can be reached at 973-870-0677 and will be offered Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) also has a crisis text line available to residents: Text NJ to 74174 in order to contact a trained counselor who will respond and offer assistance. DCF has provided [a handout](#) on toll-free hotlines/helplines available.