

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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### ***Interim Guidance for the Reopening of Higher Education Campuses with On-Campus Residential Populations for the Spring 2021 Semester (01-08-2021)***

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*The purpose of this guidance is to provide best-practice recommendations for the reopening of campus facilities and the repopulation of students on campuses with residential populations at Institutions of Higher Education (IHE).*

*Although not intended for IHE campuses that serve predominantly or strictly commuter students (and therefore have no capacity to provide student testing services), DPH does recommend that those institutions encourage their students who live in high-risk communities to seek regular testing at one of the many free community-based COVID-19 testing locations in our state. A list of free community COVID-19 testing sites can be found at:*  
<https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/Priority-Populations>

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The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is offering the following recommendations as a set of best-practice strategies to minimize the COVID-19 transmission and outbreak risks involved with reopening residential campuses during this time. Both the experience in our state with the Fall 2020 semester and reviews of mobility and case rate data indicate that the movement of individuals around IHE campuses is an important factor in determining the risk of COVID-19 cases on campus. This becomes much more important when community infection rates are very high, as we expect they will be throughout January and February. In addition, the potential for spread of a new SARS-CoV-2 variant that is more easily transmissible introduces another significant variable into our calculus of ongoing risk (e.g., the B.1.1.7 variant, commonly known as the UK variant).

Ideally, delaying campus repopulation until February 2021 and keeping classes virtual until mid-February (i.e., after most residential students have completed a re-entry quarantine period) would reduce the potential for increased cases and/or outbreaks on campuses as they reopen. However, DPH recognizes that changing the timing of campus repopulation or shifting the course of the Spring 2021 semester may not be possible for some IHEs at this time. Therefore, regardless of when the repopulation of campuses to residential students will begin, DPH recommends the following related to testing and quarantine procedures.



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## **Test and quarantine all residential students prior to fully opening campuses.**

- Residential students should receive a negative molecular test (e.g., RT-PCR) within the 7 days prior to their “move-in” date.
- Residential students should receive an antigen or molecular test upon arrival on campus (Day 0) and entry into quarantine.
- Residential students should observe their entire quarantine period in residence on campus (i.e., in the dormitory where movements can be controlled) rather than at their permanent home residence or elsewhere.
- Residential students should receive a molecular test at Day 7 of quarantine or later.
- It is recommended schools refer to the DPH Interim Guidance on the Length of Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection in determining the appropriate quarantine period for their specific campus repopulation plan (<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DPH/HAI/COVID19-CTquarantineguidance12-16-20v2.pdf>).
- IHEs should be aware that both CDC and DPH have indicated that an individual’s ability to end quarantine before 14 days is conditioned on their ability to continue with daily COVID-19 symptom screening, continuous mask use when outside of the home, as well as avoiding gatherings with people who are not in their immediate household, who are over 65 years old, or who have medical conditions that place them at increased risk for COVID-19.
- Non-residential students should be advised to severely limit their interactions with individuals outside of their household (including with the surrounding community) before the beginning of the academic semester.

## **Increase testing protocols for students through the end of February 2021.**

Current research suggests increased testing as an important strategy in preventing and controlling outbreaks on IHE campuses (<https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3365>).

Due to the continuing high community rates of transmission in many of the communities that include IHE campuses in the state, DPH recommends that schools plan to increase their cadence for testing of students to ensure that all residential students, as well as any traditional undergraduate students residing in off-campus housing who will be accessing campus to attend classes or otherwise, are tested a minimum of once per week for January and February 2021.

The intent would be for this weekly testing cadence to begin in the form of pre-arrival and in-quarantine testing as described above (Days -7, 0, and 7) and then continue until at least the end of February 2021. Ideally, weekly testing would be in the form of molecular testing; however, antigen testing can be used for students living on campus (i.e., congregate settings) provided that:

- Test results (both positive and negative) can be reported to DPH in a prescribed electronic format at least weekly.
- Positive antigen test results can be confirmed with a molecular test.

- A weekly testing cadence can be maintained throughout at least the months of January and February 2021.

Given that the ability of campus administrators to control the movements and interactions of off-campus students is admittedly limited in many situations, DPH recommends that if IHEs with congregate residential populations cannot provide traditional undergraduate students residing in off-campus housing with weekly testing, that those students be restricted from attending classes or otherwise visiting campus in-person through February 2021.