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MDHHS issues guidance encouraging colleges and universities to require COVID-19 testing for on- and off-campus students

LANSING, MICH. Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) released new guidance encouraging colleges and universities to require COVID-19 testing of students who live in the immediate university community, even if the students do not live on campus.

"We know there have been outbreaks of COVID-19 on college campuses across the country, and it has an impact on disease spread beyond the campus community," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health, "Colleges have stepped up throughout this pandemic to slow disease spread through testing and quarantine protocols. With the arrival of the new variant in Michigan and risk of virus spread both on- and off-campus, it is best practice to implement robust testing protocols in these settings. Colleges and universities have an important role to play in ending this pandemic."

Numerous studies published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have demonstrated that, while social distancing in college classrooms is important, transmission of COVID-19 around colleges likely occurs primarily outside of the classroom. In Michigan, more than 180 identified cases of COVID-19 were associated with one gathering at one bar in East Lansing. Risks of transmission have increased with the new arrival of the new, more contagious COVID-19 variant in Michigan.

The guidance released today, on which MDHHS has consulted with colleges and universities across the state, identifies numerous strategies they can use to test broadly within their communities. These 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.
- If resources are more constrained, require testing for all students in the campus community on a regular but random basis.
- Target limited mandatory testing resources based on information about community spread, including information from wastewater testing, provided that the information and the potential for testing reach all students living on or near the campus.

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.

Whatever testing strategy is used, 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, 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.

“We are grateful for all that colleges are doing so that there are fewer campus outbreaks this spring,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “Based on what we have seen, required testing for students around universities is critical to protecting lives and minimizing interruptions to learning.”

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus. To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine.

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