

## Faculty/Instructors/Staff—Twin Cities Campus

# What to do if a student shares they have COVID-19 or that they have been exposed to COVID-19

## Classroom, advising, or other learning or student life settings

### Overview

The UMN is advising all members of our campus communities (students, staff, and faculty) to take steps to notify those persons with whom they have had close contact of possible exposure and the need for testing when they receive a positive test result for COVID-19. An [Inform section](#) of the UMTC *Safe Campus* website has been created to support this expectation. This document is designed to provide additional guidance to faculty, instructors and staff for use in your educational settings, and as you work with individual students. (*Links for all UMN system campuses are noted on the right.*)

**COVID-19 resources and guidance for UMN system campuses:**

**Crookston Campus:**  
<https://protectthenest.crk.umn.edu>

**Duluth Campus:**  
<https://z.umn.edu/umguidance>

**Morris Campus:**  
<https://morris.umn.edu/covid-19-resources/covid-19-faq>

**Rochester Campus:**  
<https://r.umn.edu/COVID-19-Expectations-and-Guidelines/health-and-safety>

**Twin Cities Campus:**  
<https://safe-campus.umn.edu/return-campus/university-planning-response>

### Here are the basics:

- Individuals with a positive COVID-19 test may receive information and a request to complete an online survey from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) via text or email. That information should be reviewed and any online survey questions from MDH should be answered. Completing the survey will help MDH better understand the current state of COVID-19 transmission in our state. Individuals with a positive COVID test should not wait for this correspondence from public health partners to notify those with whom they have had close contact as defined below:

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently defines exposure as close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case closer than 6 feet for a combined total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. Note that “contacts of contacts” are not considered exposed to COVID-19.*

- **Those notified of exposure should be advised as follows:**
  - If you are fully vaccinated:
    - Continue to attend classes and fully participate in all activities, including employment, or
    - Stay home if you have symptoms. Get tested as soon as possible. Avoid others for at least 10 days since symptoms appeared.
    - Get tested 3–5 days after the close contact or as soon as possible if you don’t know when you had close contact. Remember that testing is available in multiple locations, including at home if you request a free test kit from the state.
    - Wear a mask for 14 days following exposure or close contact or until your test result is negative.
  - If you are not fully vaccinated:

- Get tested as soon as possible and 3–5 days after the exposure. Consider regular testing after that. Remember that testing is available in multiple locations, including at home if you request a free test kit from the state.
  - Stay home regardless of symptoms. Avoid others for up to 14 days. This [calculator](#) may be helpful in determining how long to isolate or quarantine in various circumstances.
  - Protect others in your household by wearing a mask, staying away from others, and taking other prevention steps.
  - For unvaccinated students in quarantine due to an exposure to COVID-19: Instructors and staff should arrange accommodations for class participation (regardless of modality). These accommodations must be consistent with the [policy on Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences](#), but do not necessarily require hy-flex or simultaneous modes of instruction. A quarantined student should not be referred to the Disability Resource Center (DRC), but any preexisting accommodations requested via the DRC should continue to be provided.
- If students seek out the assistance of an instructor to identify those with whom they have been in contact—e.g., in a small seminar setting, classroom, or lab with an available seating chart—the instructor should provide assistance with contact information or assist with notifications if asked. Supervisors and managers, in other similar settings, should be prepared to offer comparable assistance if asked by an employee.
  - With many venues—such as dining halls, student unions, large classrooms with no seating charts, and event sites—identifying those with whom someone has been in close contact may not be possible. Students and employees are encouraged to use the [COVIDAwareMN](#) app for those settings.
  - Mass notifications of entire classrooms should not be made unless there is a documented public health reason to do so as reviewed by public health partners in Boynton Health or the Health Emergency Response Office (for example, there is reason to believe a large percentage of students in the classroom meet the CDC definition of close contact). Additional rationale is provided in the FAQ below.
  - Instructors or staff on the Twin Cities campus with concerns about multiple or increased student reports of positive COVID tests may call the Boynton Nurse Line at **612-625-7900** to review their concerns and determine if enhanced mitigation strategies are warranted in a given setting.
  - Confidentiality of personal health information is paramount at all times. Instructors and staff **may not disclose** to classes, colleagues, or others that someone is sick, has a positive COVID-19 test, or that someone is in quarantine due to exposure.
  - All members of the University community systemwide must comply with University guidelines and directives to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19, including wearing [face coverings](#) in all indoor settings (with limited exceptions). The University’s shared commitment is captured in [Stop the Spread of COVID-19](#).

## Recap: What to do if a student discloses they have tested positive or tells you they may have been exposed to COVID-19

### **Instructors and staff should:**

- **Arrange instructional accommodations if required:** If a student must isolate or quarantine, instructors and staff should arrange accommodations for class participation (regardless of modality). These accommodations must be consistent with the [policy on Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences](#), but do not necessarily require hy-flex or simultaneous modes of instruction. (Refer to the policy and [related FAQs](#) for

guidance). A student in isolation or quarantine should not be referred to the Disability Resource Center (DRC), but any preexisting accommodations requested via the DRC should continue to be provided.

- **Advise students of mental health resources when appropriate:** Students who are feeling stressed or overwhelmed amid the challenges of COVID-19 should be encouraged to call the U of M Crisis Line at 612-301-4673 anytime or text "UMN" to 61222 on evenings and weekends.
- **Assist students who ask for assistance with *individual* exposure notifications if you have information available for that purpose.** If students seek out the assistance of an instructor to identify those with whom they have been in contact, e.g., in a small seminar setting or lab with an available seating chart, the instructor should provide assistance with contact information or assist with notifications if asked.
- **Advise the student who discloses to you they have been notified of exposure** to get tested. Students on the Twin Cities campus who have questions can contact the Boynton Nurse Line at **612-625-7900** (answered 24/7) or another trusted health care provider. Boynton Health or health care providers will provide guidance on whether a test is needed, where to find testing site locations, and whether students should stay home from classes, work, and other activities. Testing is available at Boynton Health for Twin Cities students and at other locations across the state. Check [MTest for statewide testing information](#).

### **Instructors and staff *should not*:**

- **Do any investigating or contact tracing.** In some instances, students may ask for assistance in identifying close contacts through seating charts or other information, if available. They may also ask for assistance with notifications. Confidentiality of private health information is paramount at all times.
- **Disclose to anyone** that a student is sick, has a positive COVID-19 test, or is in quarantine due to exposure. Each individual's health status is protected by data privacy laws. Do not tell classes, department colleagues, student groups, teams, etc. of suspected or confirmed positive cases or individuals quarantined due to exposure unless instructed to do so by public health officials.
- **Communicate in any other way about a student's private health information** (illness, test results, etc.)—including messages within department/unit/college—to ensure that we comply with [HIPAA privacy regulations](#), [FERPA guidelines](#), and [Minnesota Government Data Practices Act requirements](#).
- **Send mass notifications to entire classrooms** unless there is a documented public health reason to do so as reviewed by public health partners in Boynton Health or the Health Emergency Response Office (for example, there is reason to believe a large percentage of students in the classroom meets the CDC definition of close contact).
- **Unilaterally change the modality of class** before receiving guidance by public health partners about the need to do so and undertaking consultation with your department chair/unit head at a minimum and others as appropriate. Consultation by departments should engage collegiate deans and the provost. Each instructor, together with their department or program, should develop contingency plans in case an early pivot becomes necessary.

## **Expectations for students**

### **Students *should*:**

- Self-monitor health every day for four critical symptoms: fever, respiratory symptoms, sore throat, or dry cough.

*Broader list of COVID-19 symptoms: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, headache, muscle pain, sore throat, loss of taste/smell, or nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea*

- Not attend in-person classes, student jobs, internships, or clinical practicums if they have any symptoms.
- Get tested if they feel sick or believe that they may have been exposed to COVID-19. Contact the Boynton Nurse Line at **612-625-7900** if they have questions.

**If exposed to COVID-19 and unvaccinated:** Quarantine as directed by health care professionals and public health officials. *Exposure is currently defined as close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case closer than 6 feet for a combined total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.*

**Regardless of vaccination status:** Seek testing for COVID-19 3–5 days from the time of exposure.

- Isolate as directed by health care professionals and public health officials if they have a confirmed positive test for COVID-19. Notify all those exposed as guided by the [UMN Inform website](#) (family, roommates, friends, significant others, classmates, co-workers, etc.).
- Provide information to (and review guidance from) public health partners via phone, email, or through online systems linked through a text.
- Follow healthcare provider or public health investigator guidance on when to return to in-person activities.
- If instructed to isolate or quarantine (symptomatic or asymptomatic): Contact your instructor as needed to request accommodations for classes as guided by [UMN policy](#) for accommodations for legitimate absences due to illness. (Refer to the policy and [related FAQs](#) for guidance.) It is not necessary to contact the Disability Resource Center.
- If serious medical complications substantially limit daily life activities and require accommodation to enable continued access to education: Contact the campus Disability Resources office. On the Twin Cities campus, contact your Access Consultant if already working with the Disability Resource Center. Otherwise, contact Student Access at [drc@umn.edu](mailto:drc@umn.edu).
- If in a University residence hall on the Twin Cities campus: Follow guidance from [Housing and Residential Life](#) to arrange housing and support for any necessary isolation or quarantine period.
- If feeling stressed or overwhelmed amid the challenges of COVID-19: Call the U of M Crisis Line at 612-301-4673 anytime or text "UMN" to 61222 on evenings and weekends.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: What if I need information specific to the Crookston, Duluth, Morris, or Rochester campuses?**

A: See the links at the top of this document for COVID-19 resource pages for each campus.

**Q: Why have these updated guidelines been released now?**

A: This shift is to aid individuals who test positive in identifying and notifying contacts quickly, which will also complement efforts by public health officials around patient interviews and contact tracing. These decisions also reflect our increased understanding of how and where COVID-19 is transmitted and the important role that vaccines play in mitigating transmission opportunities. To support timely notification of close contacts, the University of Minnesota is taking the following steps:

- Launching new systemwide online resources to support patient-driven notification of close contacts for persons with a positive test for COVID-19.
- Promoting use of [COVIDAwareMN](#) to all students, staff, and faculty.

- Providing additional information and resources on notifying contacts to all residence hall students who report to housing offices that they have received a positive COVID-19 test result.
- Providing additional information and resources to all patients receiving a positive test result for COVID-19 from a campus health service.

**Q: What about situations in which the students with a positive COVID-19 test result have no information about the persons who were a close contact to them?**

- A. With many venues—such as dining halls, student unions, large classrooms with no seating charts, and event sites—identifying those with whom someone has been in close contact is challenging. Students and employees are encouraged to use the [COVIDAwareMN](#) app for those settings.

Broadcast notifications in such circumstances are weak substitutes for targeted notices and risk undermining the privacy of the health status of the individual who has a positive test for COVID-19. Broad notifications also have the potential to either cause panic or lead individuals to ignore more targeted warnings in the future. Broad notifications without information on the date of possible exposure may also undercut the effectiveness of testing recommendations to those known to be in direct contact with someone who has a positive test result for COVID-19.

All members of our community should be aware that given the suspected high level of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus in all communities, everyone should assume there are individuals carrying the virus in all small, medium, and large group settings. The health risk to those vaccinated, however, is extremely low. Those exposed who become infected have mild or no illness in the vast majority of cases.

At the present time, however, the CDC continues to recommend notifying those with close contact when that is possible. If that guideline changes in the future, we will adjust our approaches accordingly.

**Q. If an instructor has been made aware a student has been exposed or has tested positive and the student shows up to class without following quarantine or other recommendations, what options does the instructor have without disclosing anything to others?**

- A: Care should be taken by instructors not to make assumptions that may reflect inaccurate or incomplete information. Generally, the only way instructors will be aware that a student is in isolation or quarantine is if a student discloses this information. This may be after a student has been exposed or tested positive and been asked by public health officials to stay in isolation or quarantine. In other cases, a student may have been asked to quarantine while awaiting test results on a roommate. If the roommate has negative test results, the student is cleared to resume normal activities. *Instructors should be careful not to make assumptions based on hearsay or rumors.*

*In instances in which the instructor has previously been told by the student that they are in isolation or quarantine:* The instructor could pull the student aside for a cordial chat before class (if that can be done confidentially, and if the student is open to a conversation). Alternatively, the instructor could proceed with the class, but email the student afterward to find out more information.

The instructor also has discretion to end the class session for the day to provide an opportunity to find out more information. The instructor *should not disclose to students the reason for suspending the class session.* A general announcement should be made to the class that would be relevant to various circumstances (e.g., "Something important has just come up and I need to end class for the day ... I'll see you at the next class session"). The instructor could then reach out to the student, as described above, or could report the student to the Office of Community Standards (OCS) for noncompliance related to University rules re: quarantine/public health protocol.

Instructors who have ongoing concerns after talking with the student, or who contact OCS, should also inform their department chair or supervisor. Deans may also consult with the provost.

Instructors should ensure that mask use guidelines are consistently followed in all class settings, following public health guidance to minimize potential exposure risks.