Vulnerable/High-Risk Populations for COVID-19 in Higher Education

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This document has been reviewed by MDH; this document was originally developed by the COVID-19 higher education workgroup focused on Vulnerable/High-Risk Populations for COVID-19. This document will continue to be updated as new information is gathered.

See Appendix A for list of workgroup members.

Purpose

All strategies are predicated on safe workplace assumptions including testing, contact tracing, monitoring, isolating, incidence of disease (adequate testing, supplies, PPE) and strict adherence to public health practices, and promotion of social responsibility to benefit all and particularly vulnerable populations.

Examples of People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness

COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe disease. Based on currently available information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People 65 years and older (See **Older Adults (CDC):** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html)

- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility

- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled (See **Groups at Higher Risk for Severe Illness (CDC):** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html). This includes:

    - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma

    - People who have serious heart conditions

    - People who are immunocompromised. Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications

    - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)

    - People with diabetes

- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis

- People with liver disease

Protecting our most vulnerable populations (medically susceptible, pregnant, undocumented, students of color, uninsured or underinsured, non-traditional, older, DACA, and homeless students, faculty, and staff members) is a moral and ethical obligation. Some vulnerable individuals may need to observe ongoing physical distancing for a more prolonged period.

See **Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era (PDF):** www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_in_the_CO VID-19_Era_May2020.pdf

Recommended Strategies

Policy Process

- Policy(s) for review during COVID-19

    - Attendance

    - Deadlines

    - Remote work/courses

    - Will there be conduct consequences for students that host gatherings in dorm rooms, student meetings that exceed the max number allowed, off-campus parties

- It is necessary to educate employees (educational campaign) so they know the safety concerns and how the institution is addressing these concerns. Ideally, this is a collaborative process that should include employee input

- In the context of our current situation, we think that institutions should thoroughly consider the role of choice for employees

- Emphasize choice and collaboration

Create a high-risk team (i.e. Care Team or similar)

- Campus would determine the facilitator of the process – who that person is, determined by institution

- Deans of Students, HR, Disability Services, health services, diversity offices

- Communication with campus community who encompasses high-risk team

- Ongoing consultation and support

Ask employees if they wish to work from home; Students provided expanded online coursework options

▪ If work can be performed remotely, it should be allowed

▪ If work can NOT be performed remotely, proceed to self-identification/interactive process

Develop process for Identifying vulnerable populations

▪ **Create a form for self-identification**

   ▪ Example: **Paid COVID-19 leave request form:** mn.gov/mmb-stat/hr-toolbox/covid-19-enterprise-leave-request-form.pdf

   ▪ Considerations when drafting a form to report high risk category:

      o Accessible (ADA but also easy to locate/available)

      o Minimizes barriers, inclusive

      o Do we require documentation or not?

      o Indicates family member at risk

      o Privacy – where does this data go?

      o Faculty v. students v. staff

      o What is legal obligation, what do we need to do v. what would be nice to do

      o Tracking who is vulnerable (communicate regarding surges, etc.)

Interactive process to assess accommodations for vulnerable populations

▪ Determine who is responsible for each group (faculty, staff, students)

   ▪ i.e. Faculty/Staff: to Human Resources

   ▪ i.e. Students: Student Services, Disability Services, Health Services, etc.

   ▪ Example for the Accessibility Resources testing center:

      o If testing center is opened, all eligible students would need access. Students with disabilities take exams in small testing space for 1 – 4 hours. If limits of one person per testing room is implemented, more space, proctors, staff time and flexibility by faculty would be needed to meet capacity. Consider not opening testing center and continue exams online, even if class is face-to-face. Additional cleaning and sanitation will be needed between testing sessions.

      o Develop system to ensure all courses are taught using accessible formats, software, media.

- Consider collaboration with Housing & Residential Life (if applicable) to fulfill guidelines in housing environment
  - Example for Student Services involvement: Collaborate with co-curricular campus services (clubs & organizations, Career Development Center, etc.) to ensure access
- Coordinate/discuss individual actionable safety plans for vulnerable populations specific to their situation
  - Example for vulnerable students: Vulnerable students would isolate with delivered meals and online learning.
  - Example for Faculty/Staff: Faculty and/or staff would work remotely or consider space modifications, schedule modifications; leave of absence (ideally paid)
- Identify what is essential in job and consideration to redefine job description if not safe to work in current role if possible

Provide a stepped up, phased-in approach for bringing back vulnerable populations and considering both community and campus triggers

- Allow vulnerable populations to remain where they are most protected (if school or campus is a better place for students to be)
- Vulnerable populations are last to reenter campus when possible (students and employees who can do work remotely should continue to do so)
- If work/study cannot be performed remotely, consider space modifications, schedule modifications; leave of absence (ideally paid)

Managing surge for vulnerable populations

- Manage list of vulnerable individuals
- Plan for communication to those individuals
- Have defined plan for dialing back to stay in place if there is an increasing positivity rate in consultation with local/state governments
- Determine capabilities of local health care to handle medical needs of high-risk population should they become ill

Resources

- American College Health Association (ACHA) - **Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era (PDF):** www.acha.org/documents/resources/guidelines/ACHA_Considerations_for_Reopening_IHEs_in_the_COVID-19_Era_May2020.pdf

- CDC - **People Who Need to Take Extra Precautions:** www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html

- **MN Governor Executive Order 20-52 (PDF):** mn.gov/governor/assets/Executive%20Order%2020-52_tcm1055-431643.pdf

- **MN Governor Executive Order 2020-55:** mn.gov/governor/assets/Executive Order 20-52_tcm1055-431643.pdf

- New York Times - **As European Schools Reopen, Relief Combines with Risk:** www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/europe/reopen-schools-germany.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage

- State of Connecticut: **Recommendations for a Phased Reopening of Colleges and Universities (PDF):** portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/05-2020/Governor-Lamont-Receives-Recommendations-for-a-Phased-Reopening-of-Colleges-and-Universities

APPENDIX A

Workgroup participants:

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