



Campus COVID-19 testing to begin in early August

As part of UW–Madison’s Smart Restart plan to resume modified in-person operations by fall, campus has been working on a number of efforts to protect the health and safety of students, faculty and staff. All of these efforts are informed by COVID-19 case trends both locally and nationally and may be modified as we continue to monitor the situation as we move forward.

Along with a face covering requirement in all indoor and some outdoor spaces, changes to ensure appropriate physical distancing, reduced density in campus spaces, availability of personal protective equipment, and enhanced cleaning protocols, UW–Madison is at work establishing campus-wide COVID-19 testing.

The planned testing program has three parts:

- Free testing for students, faculty and staff at multiple campus-based testing sites;
- Required testing on a biweekly basis for those living and working in residence halls, including students and employees;
- Routine surveillance testing. One part of this will involve volunteer cohorts consisting of faculty, staff, and graduate assistants from representative areas of campus to monitor for prevalence of the virus, including asymptomatic cases. These cohorts will include more than 1,000 individuals who will be tested weekly. We will also test 300-to-500 undergraduate students each week. Students will be chosen at random via email and will be offered incentives to get testing at one of the campus-based testing sites.

We expect to have on-campus testing fully operational by the start of the fall semester on September 2. We are establishing an on-campus testing facility which we hope to open in early August.

UW–Madison’s COVID-19 Testing Work Group consists of representatives from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education, the School of Medicine and Public Health, University Health Services, the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, the UW–Madison Biotechnology Center, the Office of Legal Affairs and UW System.

To help meet the diagnostic testing needs of our campus community, the Working Group has been tasked with establishing a testing program that has the capacity to process a minimum of 6,000 COVID-19 viral tests per week. This will help us quickly identify anyone actively infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, conduct swift contact tracing to identify those who may have been exposed, identify for isolation those who are sick or infected, quarantine those at risk, and ensure campus spaces are properly disinfected.

The Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Lab (WVDL) and the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene (WSLH) are partnering to conduct testing under WSLH’s federal CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments) license. Already national experts in diagnostic disease testing, WVDL is training with WSLH staff to perform human diagnostic testing for COVID-19. They will collaborate with the UW–Madison Biotechnology Center to develop new testing protocols that improve the capacity and efficiency of campus testing. University Health Services is also working with these campus partners to coordinate COVID-19 testing.

Campus will use an FDA-approved PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that detects the genetic material unique to SARS-CoV-2 virus. We do not have plans to conduct antibody tests, which may be informative for identifying a past infection.