

October 25, 2020

Dear Students

We are writing to communicate some important COVID-19-related information. *The synopsis is:*

- 1) *Regional COVID-19 transmission is rising*
- 2) *We must be more careful than ever during the coming weeks and months by:*
 - a. *Avoiding unmasked social events with people who don't live with us*
 - b. *Reporting all potential COVID-19 symptoms to Student Health*
- 3) *Cases are likely to occur amongst our WUSM educational community in the coming months*
 - a. *Details about cases can only be communicated to those who are deemed close contacts*

We are at an important point in the COVID-19 pandemic that requires our collective attention. COVID-19 transmission rates are rising in our region and may soon surpass our prior peaks of diagnosed cases. It is unclear yet whether that will translate into alterations in hospital practices that will affect our clinical education mission. Unlike the spring, we know much more about how to prevent transmission and take care of patients safely. At this time, disruptions in the clinical curriculum are NOT anticipated but could occur if required objectives cannot be met or if PPE becomes scarce. Likewise, at this time, we believe our mitigation strategies will allow for continued in-person sessions but **we must maintain a high level of vigilance using all of the measures that we know reduce the risk of transmission, particularly avoiding unmasked social gatherings.**

Because of the incredible job all of you have been doing with masking and maintaining distancing on campus, and the attention given to avoiding unmasked get togethers off campus, we have been fortunate to have had very few WUSM educational community members acquiring COVID-19 on campus or at sponsored events. To date, there have been no known transmission events on campus, and we hope to continue this success throughout the remainder of the pandemic. One vital layer of our mitigation strategy is the symptom screening. People with COVID-19 who have symptoms are more contagious than those who don't and could lead to super spreading events. **It is absolutely critical that we all are 100% truthful in reporting symptoms in the daily screening before coming to campus. We simply CANNOT have people on campus with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 without an appropriate evaluation.**

With the rising community prevalence, we are increasing testing when only mild symptoms are present in the absence of another identified cause. Also, remember that sometimes suspicious symptoms may be caused by other conditions requiring urgent treatment. **Please call or e-mail Dr. Winters in Student Health with any new symptoms you develop.** She will order COVID-19 testing if indicated at no cost to you and can determine if other medical problems need to be treated.

We anticipate that some members of the WUSM educational community will unfortunately become infected as we navigate through the remaining months of the pandemic. While we have substantial control over minimizing, if not eliminating, the risk of transmission on campus, we know that sometimes

community members may become infected through social interactions and may be on campus for some activities prior to being diagnosed. When this happens, there is a specific case investigation and contact tracing process that is performed by Dr. Winters and her staff, who will reach out to all individuals who meet criteria for being a close contact that would require quarantine. **When ALL mitigation measures are being used, including not coming to school with symptoms, appropriate masking at all times, and spending less than 15 minutes within 6 feet of others; then nobody participating in curriculum activities should be considered a close contact because these are designed to avoid transmission even when a case might be present.** If you do not receive a communication from Dr. Winters and her team, then you have not been identified as a contact who would need to quarantine, i.e. “no news is good news”. **For confidentiality purposes, the institution CANNOT disclose health information, including who has tested positive, and it is important that community members avoid speculating or passing along confidential information if they happen to learn details.** For this reason, details that might identify a person as being positive cannot be disclosed to anybody other than those who need to know if they are deemed to be close contacts.

We know the road ahead of us will have some bumps, but we are confident that we can reach our destination of a successfully completed academic year when we work together to look out for each other and care for each other. The pandemic fatigue we all feel is real, yet it can be manageable by taking time for ourselves and maintaining social connections safely. We will plan to provide further updates periodically. If you have any questions or concerns please do reach out to us. We are here for you: to help you to stay safe while providing the highest quality medical education possible.

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