

Student town hall Nov. 11, 2020

84 attendees

This is a follow up on the email from last night about changing our transmission level to orange and background on why we reached that decision. For the week of Oct. 26, we had 7 positive cases; Nov. 2, 9; and then the first three days of this week 12. We're seeing an uptick in cases which is cause for concern. We had 180 students in quarantine today, that's more than 17 percent of our student body. We delivered 120 meals twice to students in quarantine. For employees, last week we had 2 positive cases, this week 4. Winona County averages well over 30 positive cases per day. The positivity rate is 9.6%. Anything above 5% is high risk for transmission. Winona Health has a lack of hospital beds, which is also a cause for concern.

The Department of Health recommended a move to level 3, orange, and the appropriate response. Gov. Walz issued a new executive order and is limiting social gatherings to no more than 10 indoors or outdoors, and no more than 3 households can participate in any one gathering. Bars/restaurants also need to close early.

Today was the first day of online classes. We've closed athletic venues and cancelled practices and strength and conditioning. We've imposed a curfew from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., and the expectation is students will be in rooms at that time. We've prohibited most in-person events. The campus is closed to visitors. The public can use hiking trails but not the paved roads on campus. Student work study can continue and off campus jobs as well. It's an important part of being able to afford college expenses. Please comply with safety protocols at your off-campus job and our internship. We have increased safety patrols at access points and will be asking for IDs. You won't be prohibited from coming back to campus after curfew but you will be asked for your ID.

Our representative from the MN Department of Health said she is impressed with what we are doing and added that we are ahead of the curve. They will be encouraging other schools to take similar action and use our communications as a template.

Individuals in the 20-24 year old age range account for 12% of all positive COVID cases nationwide - the highest percentage of any age range. For the week of October 24, there were over 400 cases on college campuses across Minnesota. That number is ticking up. Students are often asymptomatic and are therefore spreading the virus to others unknowingly. This is why we're asking you to stay on campus; this is a 14-day quarantine essentially, to keep students from spreading this illness to families.

The MN Department of Health is encouraging students to be tested before they go home. We have ordered 600 saliva based tests that will be delivered Monday and we will be hosting a free mass testing for students on Monday on Sunday in the gymnasium. An email will be coming out.

Where are these stats coming from?

A COVID dashboard is located on our main website, smumn.edu. It's broken down into daily and weekly positive tests by students and employees. We have a detailed spreadsheet documenting all students in isolation and quarantine. We track when students go in and out of quarantine or isolation and whether or not they go home. The Winona Daily News reports daily totals in Winona County. The positivity rate comes from a website called COVID Act Now.

Can students go home earlier than Nov. 24 (last day of classes)?

Students are permitted to, but we ask students to consider this carefully and discuss whether or not they should return home with their families. We are highly encouraging students to stay to protect the health and safety of their families.

What about those who have to stay during break (student teachers, international students)?

Students will receive additional information from the residence life office about what will be occurring. There will be limited services available. Because there is no food service, they may once again have access at that time to kitchen areas.

What is the rationale for closing Gostomski Fieldhouse?

While we were "Green," we had the fieldhouse open and masks were required. We kept it open at yellow as well. Now that we are orange, we need to close spaces where students will be together. Also, when exercising, you are expelling more air so aerosols are released which puts people at higher risk. We appreciate the desire for people to be healthy, but feel we had to make that decision for the health and safety of all students.

For mental health, how do we blow off steam?

Cardinal Spirit events are all now virtual. Some did need to be cancelled. Upcoming events include a tie dye event, painting, and virtual Bingo. Kits will be available for pickup for tie dying and painting. Later that evening, you can sign onto the Zoom and paint. SAC will continue activities during break. The activities won't stop just because students are going home. A virtual support group is scheduled for later in November. Watch for news. Counseling services are available to students; contact the Wellness Center to schedule those appointments. If you have friends who would benefit, encourage them to reach out.

How are other universities doing?

Some colleges and universities didn't bring their entire student body back. Macalester, for example, only brought its first year class in . Gustavus may have done something similar. We hear rumors that other schools are looking at moving online. Some Minnesota schools were going to send students home for Thanksgiving and then bring them back, but nearly all have made the decision to not bring them back.

We have a large graduate school and partner for online learning. Faculty have been preparing for this transition. This summer, nearly all faculty took a course geared toward teaching them

how to be effective online. Two other courses were offered that were more advanced about teaching online. Instructional technology has been working closely with faculty as well.

Some individuals are saying they have roommates and it is difficult when one student is online and the other isn't or if one student has to be active/loud online. Is there a spot students can go to?

The library is open; study rooms are open. Masks will be required. No eating or drinking will be allowed in the library. We'll make a note to see if there are other spaces we can make available to students.

Will the Market stay open?

Yes, and students are using it much more this week, burning flex dollars. So if you need last minute coffee or chocolate fix, it's available for you. We had students who went through the Market and bought a lot. Be respectful of others who want to purchase items and the staff members who work there.

Cardinal Coffee and Cardinal Club are also still open but hours will be reduced a bit at Cardinal Club.

If I'm a student and don't feel comfortable eating in the cafeteria or Cardinal Club, can someone else pick up a meal for me or deliver a meal to me?

We are working on a plan. We hope our students feel safe, and we are trying to social distance as much as possible.

What do students need to do if they choose to leave early or if parents are asking them to?

The Residence Life office sent out information today. We are not encouraging you to do that, but if your family wants you to come home, you will need to go through the check-out process.

Tell us more about testing

More information about the testing will be sent tomorrow, so it will probably be a separate email. We are working with the MN Dept. of Health on protocols for testing. You can also go to the Winona Mall to be tested there. If you need transportation, there is information about a van that will provide transportation (check covid website: smumn.edu/covidplanning).

What if we had to change another color? What needs to occur for that to happen? Are we ready if that would happen?

We'd have to have a very significant increase in COVID cases to get to the next level. We're not anticipating that would happen.

It was a quick jump for yellow to orange.

We were fortunate that we were green for a very long time. WSU, for example, has been yellow since September. A lot of schools were already in yellow and are now moving to orange. It's because of all of the hard work our students did that we were green most of the semester.

Quarantine questions:

There are options: students can go home, can stay within their residence hall room, can move to temporary housing at Loretto Hall. It is a residence hall owned by Cotter Schools that was empty. It is being used as an overflow quarantine space. Our numbers go up and down quite quickly. It's either 10 or 14 days in quarantine.

Students are already at home and may want to return to campus and get things. Are there suggestions?

We would ask you to reach out to Marisa Quinn, AVP for Student Affairs, and she will work with you on a case-by-case basis (mquinn@msumn.edu or covid@smumn.edu),

What does it look like now that we're getting close to two weeks before we depart if I test positive and have a 10-day quarantine or if I test positive next week?

It may mean you'll be required to stay here over the Thanksgiving holiday, and we don't want that to happen. Be careful with social distancing. We can't allow you to travel, if you are positive, because it puts your family at significant risk. Reduce your close contact list significantly. Don't be within 6 feet of someone without your mask on.

Watch that 5-7 day period after you've last been exposed to someone who tests positive.

If you are not feeling well, please stay in your room. Call the Wellness Center (457-1492) if you have any questions about your symptoms.

Where do I find information?

Watch your newsletters and email; check out smumn.edu/about/covidplanning.

Can students still use trails?

Students can continue to use trails. We encourage you to wear masks. Let Campus Safety know if you see someone not using a mask. Students can also walk around campus, and the community can not.

What if I forget something (books)?

It's important that you bring everything you need with you. Please take your books that you need for classes home.

What about rental books?

Information will go in the community newsletter about how that process will work.

What does winter athletics look like?

We don't know yet. The MIAC is still examining this and we are looking at MIAC and Department of Health guidelines. Will need to make a decision about what we at Saint Mary's would do once the MIAC announces a decision. We've already had discussions about if we could not compete, how can we continue to offer competitive experiences to our students.

What about spring semester?

Read the community newsletter; that is our primary means of conveying information. The plan is for students to start classes on Jan. 25. We'll be getting more information out about what move-in will look like and other details.

What if I want virtual counseling and have a roommate and need privacy?

You can come to Vlazny Hall for confidential counseling.

What will security be during break?

Campus Safety will be on campus doing patrols throughout break as they do every other break. Buildings will move to card access only so only Saint Mary's employees will be permitted in facilities..

Will we have mental health days next spring?

Faculty are working those into the schedule. We heard that clearly from students this year.

Will workload be front loaded?

We will send these questions to academics and let you know the answers.

How does curfew work?

Students are expected to be in their rooms during curfew. Campus Safety will patrol access points. The guard booth will be staffed. Students arriving on campus after curfew will be asked to provide their IDs, but will be admitted onto campus.

Will faculty be on campus?

Faculty are permitted to be on campus. Some have indicated they will teach from their classrooms.

Question about duration of quarantine?

We follow the Minnesota Department of Health guidance. A negative test will not release students from quarantine as it is only a point in time. The gestation period for COVID is up to 14 days so quarantine is for that length of time.

Do those testing this week and next have to quarantine?

No, you do not have to quarantine if you do not have symptoms or have not been in close contact with a positive case.

Do I turn in my keys?

No, you do not. You do not have to move everything out. You just need to take what you need for a two-month departure.

Might we go down in color?

That would be great; we could all leave happier

Where are we now vs. March?

We clearly expected a surge once everyone went indoors, but we thought we would start from a lower point. We thought things would settle down over the summer, and they didn't, and then numbers shot up with college students returning to campus. We're starting from a higher base than was anticipated.

How can we help our peers to adhere to guidelines?

Student Senate and student leaders have great ideas on how to encourage students. Let them know your ideas.

If we are adhering to guidelines better, is there a way we can benefit by reopening things before Nov. 24?

Definitely.

Will the dashboard reboot for the second semester?

That's a good question. We will discuss this.

Will this recording be shared?

Yes, we'll get this out to students in an email or in the community newsletter.