

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
PRE-FILED RESOLUTION
(Final; Action)

RS.22.02 Resolution Regarding Data Collection and Instructor Notification in Cases of Students with Highly Infectious Diseases in Instructional Settings

WHEREAS the pandemic is far from over; and

WHEREAS the Champaign-Urbana Public Health Department (CUPHD) is responsible for contact tracing of all cases of COVID-19 in the community; and

WHEREAS Chancellor Jones and Provost Cangelaris have assured the university community in many public fora that CUPHD follows all the guidelines of the CDC regarding contact tracing of students in instructional settings of Institutions of Higher Learning (IHEs)¹; and

WHEREAS these CDC guidelines state that “an infected person can spread SARS-CoV-2 starting as early as 2 days before they have any symptoms (or for people with no COVID-like symptoms, 2 days before their positive specimen was collected)” and the guidelines define a “close contact” during this 2 day period prior to the onset of symptoms or a positive test collection as someone who “was less than 6 feet away from infected person (laboratory-confirmed or clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period”²; and

WHEREAS the CDC guidelines further state that close contacts in IHEs include both vaccinated and unvaccinated students, whether protected by a mask or not; and

WHEREAS CDC guidelines require that case investigators tell close contacts to quarantine if they are unvaccinated or to take a test within 5-7 days if they are fully vaccinated; and

WHEREAS the federated data collected from all case investigations of infected students at a particular IHE therefore includes the number of classes in which these infected students were present within the 2 day period prior to their symptoms or their positive test collection, whichever is earlier, and the number of close contacts who were identified in these classes; and

WHEREAS many instructors at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign have concerns about whether and when infectious students have been in their classrooms, causing instructors to be worried that they or their students may have been exposed to an infected student; and

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/contact-tracing.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fcolleges-universities%2Fcontact-tracing.html

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>

WHEREAS these worries are exacerbated because instructors are not routinely told that an infected student was in their classroom nor are they routinely asked by case investigators for information that may help identify close contacts, so that many instructors are therefore concerned that perhaps not all exposed individuals, including themselves, have been identified by the case investigator if and when they happen to be informed by one of their students that they tested positive for COVID-19 and will need to miss classes; and

WHEREAS these worries are further exacerbated when instructors are immunocompromised or are caretakers of young children or elderly parents or have other legitimate reasons to want to know that their classrooms are safe and, whenever an infectious student may happen to have been present during a class period, that all precautions have been taken to prevent the further spread of the virus in the classroom; and

WHEREAS the concerns of many UIUC instructors are not unlike those of instructors at other universities, or of the instructors at other campuses of the University of Illinois System; and

WHEREAS the University of Illinois Chicago Contact Tracing and Epidemiology Program (CCTEP), for example, follows the same CDC guidelines for IHEs as does our CUPHD, but offers a different model in how they deal with instructor concerns about classroom safety; and

WHEREAS CCTEP informs instructors when a student tests positive for COVID-19 and has been present in the instructor's class during the 2-day window of the disease's infectiousness prior to first symptoms or the positive test collection; and

WHEREAS CCTEP follows the legal requirements of FERPA and HIPAA in de-identifying student personal data when it informs instructors about an infectious student having been present in their classroom³; and

WHEREAS the Director of CCTEP informs instructors about the fact of an infectious student having been in the classroom for the following reasons:

“We always will notify the instructor for a few reasons. The first is because we will always inquire about seating documentation so we can better ascertain who was exposed. Additionally, we have found that being transparent helps both students and instructors feel more comfortable. We have often found that notifying classrooms, even when there was not an exposure helps everyone understand that the situation was addressed and that should they have been exposed, they would have been contacted.”⁴
And

³ Email communication from the Director of the CCTEP (11/9/2021) , Ms. Natalia Lopez-Yanez. Ms. Lopez-Yanez further explains that, with supervisors of infected students with on-campus jobs, “we do not share information about symptoms, test dates, medical care received, or other private health information; we only share the time frame when the person was believed to be infectious.” Ms. Lopez-Yanez describes these protocols as compliant with FERPA and HIPAA regulations regarding the privacy of student identifying information.

⁴ Personal email communication from Natalia Lopez-Yanez, 11/10/2021

WHEREAS many instructors at UIUC want and deserve the same level of concern and transparency as is shown to instructors by the CCTEP at UIC; and

WHEREAS many of our peer institutions across the country share de-identified data about the safety of instructional spaces with individual instructors and/or with all instructors in a federated and de-identified form on a regular basis, to provide transparency and mitigate the legitimate anxieties of instructors about the safety of their instructional spaces; and

WHEREAS CUPHD is an independent health department and does not answer to the university chain of command in the way that CCTEP does at UIC;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Academic Senate of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign charges the Chair of the Senate Executive Committee to convey in writing to the Administrator of the CUPHD Julie Pryde and to the Deputy Administrator Dr. Awais Vaid that the Senate respectfully requests that they take steps to allay the concerns of many instructors by having case investigators (1) share with instructors the fact that a student was in their classroom during the 2 day window of their infectiousness, de-identifying all PII in conformity with FERPA and HIPAA regulations, and (2) use this as an opportunity to solicit from the instructors any information that may be useful in helping to identify close contacts in the classroom of the infected student; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the written communication to the Administrator and Deputy Administrator of CUPHD also request that, whether or not they choose to take the aforementioned steps to allay instructor worries and gather additional data about potential exposures in the classrooms, that the following federated and de-identified data, collected during case investigations of our students, be shared with the Chancellor or someone designated by the Chancellor on a biweekly basis, namely (1) the number of classrooms in which an infectious student (in the 2 day window prior to the onset of symptoms or positive test collection) was present during the prior two weeks and (2) the number of close contacts of such students who were exposed to infectious students in instructional settings, and how many of these contacts tested positive (all data to be de-identified), in order to assure all the members of the university community that our instructional spaces are as safe as possible no matter what fluctuations and spikes may occur during the pandemic, within the limits of the contact tracing procedures recommended by the CDC for IHEs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the written communication to the Administrator and Deputy Administrator of the CUPHD conclude by thanking them and their staff for the valuable work they have been doing during the pandemic in keeping the community safe and assure them that our requests are made with respect and deference to their authority and judgment in this matter, and are in no way meant to be a criticism of the work of the CUPHD to date.

Presented by:

Kay Kirkpatrick, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics

Bruce Rosenstock, Senator, Religion Department