



SOUTHERN VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
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COVID-19 Response Framework for Health and Well-Being of the University Community

Dear members of the Southern Virginia University community,

We realize there are concerns about the COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation and how it might affect the University and all of us. We are learning more each day, including important good news and research that is becoming available as recently as today.

First, the new virus now appears to be much less threatening than had generally been thought. The large majority of those who develop the illness have light or minimal cases, no more than a cold or flu. Even in the hardest hit areas of China, for example, the rate of serious or critical illness and death as a percentage of the population has been much lower than originally expected.

Second, illness from this new virus has been especially low among children, youth and college students. The incidence among people less than 30 years old is extremely low, so college students appear to be at very modest risk of serious illness.

Third, reducing the risk of exposure is the central theme of our COVID-19 (CV-19) Response Plan for the University. Reducing risk of exposure is a positive strategy that works, and will definitely reduce the rate of infection, so even without a vaccine or antiviral drug much can be done to protect and reduce the incidence of serious illness by reducing the risk of exposure.

Fourth, we are aware of no cases of CV-19 in our University community nor in our extended Buena Vista/Lexington area, or the surrounding area.

In light of this information and best practices, we elected yesterday to not have a full gathering of the University. In order to include important new information, I'm writing today to share our University Response Plan and introduce a framework we will use to manage our ongoing response to CV-19. This framework will give us options for increasing levels of protection that will likely become necessary in coming weeks. We have several important advantages relative to most colleges. We're not located in a large, densely-populated urban center with heavy international travel and interaction. We are capable and agile, can move quickly, and thanks to our exceptional faculty and strong partnership with Apple, we are better equipped with options to carry on and help students complete their classes.

Our object is to balance:

- a) Health and safety in the midst of the CV-19 situation,
- b) Assure academic progress and completed course credit, and
- c) Continue operating as long as possible the educational, social, religious and athletic experiences of our campus life.

The University CV-19 Response Team will continue to closely monitor developments, assess the evolving risk of infection and illness and, as appropriate, make decisions to move to successively higher levels of protection. Please also note that because this is a rapidly evolving situation, other additional changes and adjustments will likely be necessary. We are doing our best in these new and dynamic circumstances.

Updates and changes will be communicated by email, with text alerts where possible, as well as posted regularly on the University website at svu.edu/covid-19.

Additional information about CV-19 and the University's Response Levels will be provided in the coming days and weeks.

University CV-19 Response Framework & Levels

Level 0: Normal state of operations, with emphasis on hygiene & sanitation

Level 1: Prepare to migrate classes from in-person/classroom to online/iPad

Level 2: Reduce risk from outside campus by restricting major on-campus events that attract significant numbers of guests and visitors, limiting high-risk travel, & canceling Spring Break and/or adjusting the academic schedule

Level 3: Reduce risk inside campus by migrating classes from in-person/classroom to online/iPad, to reduce close contact in classrooms

Level 4: Close campus to end risk of infection or transmission from close contact

The University is currently at Response Level 1

After meeting with the faculty, staff, students, and other constituencies, the faculty have commenced preparation for online class migration. Our partnership with Apple, which we began more than two years ago in anticipation of such a need, puts us in prime position to respond quickly to exactly this kind of situation. Given the current progress of CV-19, there is an increasing likelihood that the University will move to Level 2 within the next few days or weeks, so please prepare with this shift in mind. We also believe it possible that the University may need to move to Level 3 or possibly Level 4 before the end of the semester. These decisions will be a function of the evolution of CV-19 and its impact, as well as actions being taken by other public and educational institutions.

Overview of the Current Situation

In the past few weeks we have seen escalating growth of CV-19 cases and deaths in Korea, Italy, Iran, and now in Washington, California and New York. Thankfully, we've also seen a consistent de-escalation in China, suggesting that at least the initial wave of the disease is receding there.

This is a significant new disease, but it is likely to pass. Remaining calm and keeping a balanced perspective is essential to an appropriate response. In high-exposure areas, the projected overall population mortality rate (as opposed to the illness mortality rate) remains relatively low, and as of now is likely to not be dramatically higher than that of a serious flu season. Rates of serious illness and death are especially low for college-age students but if infected, students can become silent carriers of the virus and put people who are older, or with compromised immune systems, at serious risk.

Avoiding infection is important not just to stay well personally, but to help protect other people who may be at higher risk. We believe the risk of transmission on our campus is currently very low, but we also know the virus is spreading and infection is escalating in some parts of the United States. Universities are adapting a variety of policies, from "wait and see" to closing entire campuses, depending on local circumstances. In some areas, schools and universities have been directed to close by government agencies.

While CV-19 is new and not yet fully understood, the best current medical knowledge strongly suggests that we should work for the best-case scenario while being prepared for any realistic possibility. It is likely the virus will continue to spread within the United States, and that it could reach our campus. The best way to reduce the likelihood of this outcome is by acting to minimize risk of exposure. The best time to begin to act is before cases develop here on campus.

We strongly believe in the value of the experience of gathering together on campus, so we will try to protect this opportunity by acting to reduce risk of exposure—consistent with our primary emphasis on health and safety. Some disruption and some inconvenient actions, will be necessary to significantly reduce risk of exposure. We can't control all conditions, but we can act to reduce risk of transmission and be well prepared for any eventuality. We appreciate everyone pitching in to make everything work as well as possible.

Plan of Action: Currently at Level 1

(A) Faculty are Preparing to Migrate Classes Online (*but in-person classes will continue for the time being*)

Over the next two weeks, our tremendous faculty will be working hard to prepare and be ready to migrate from in-classroom to online class sessions if and when the time comes. This period of preparation will need to be completed by Monday, March 23.

(B) Restriction on Large Gatherings

As with a cold or flu virus, dense, crowded conditions with close personal contact are more likely to facilitate the spread of illness. To reduce these risks during this period of international outbreak, we will need to manage the size and frequency of campus gatherings, meetings, and University-sponsored travel on a case-by-case basis.

As of this week, large indoor gatherings need to be limited. This will be reviewed and adapted with regular updates as conditions change.

Plan of Action: Response Going Forward

We will continue to monitor and review the best current medical research and epidemiological evidence to assess current level of risk. If the outbreak continues to accelerate and approach closer to campus, the shift to Level 2 or Level 3 could take place within the next week. Alternatively, things might stabilize and there may be no new cases nearby.

At this point, there is an increasing likelihood that the University could move to Level 2 within the next few days or weeks. If this occurs, Spring Break will need to be canceled. We also believe it possible that the University may need to move to Level 3 or possibly Level 4 before the end of the semester. Any change in the University's current level of response will be promptly communicated with additional information.

Finally, any students or employees who become ill or experience the onset of suspicious symptoms (dry cough, fever, shortness of breath) are asked to remain home, self-isolate, and promptly report the onset of their symptoms. Students should report both to their professors and Dean Crowther or the Office of Student Life by emailing studentlife@svu.edu. Employees should report to their supervisor and to Adam Whipple, Director of HR, by emailing hr@svu.edu. For the remainder of this CV-19 response period, there will be no penalties for appropriate student or employee absences due to these symptoms and related illness, as long as they report their condition properly to both places indicated above.

Conclusion

We are now at Response Level 1, and recognize the possibility of needing to move to Level 2 within the next few days or weeks. We believe that actions taken early will have the greatest chance of decreasing risk and preserving the opportunity to safely complete our semester here on campus. We also believe that the potential consequences of not acting would outweigh these short-term challenges. These new policies are temporary, for the period of the national outbreak, and will be regularly reviewed and modified as needed to protect health and safety. We will continue to communicate any changes in real time by email, and with text alerts as possible, as well as by posting updates to the University website at svu.edu/covid-19.

I would like to thank our excellent faculty and administration, a great team who are working diligently on these matters. We will continue to work with our local, state, accreditation, athletic, federal, and university partners to address the issues based on the best available public health expertise and recommendations.

We realize there is uncertainty in this situation, so we have created a concrete plan with specific steps following best practices that will allow us to act in a balanced and timely way as soon as, but not before, evidence warrants. We are committed to the health and safety of all members of the University community by restricting risk of exposure, and also wish to preserve as long as is prudent the valuable experience of continuing to attend college on the SVU campus. It would be wise to recognize that things are likely to evolve, and could evolve very quickly as has been the case in Italy, Korea, and Washington state, or more slowly thanks to our location in an area of low population density and relative isolation from major urban and transportation centers. It would be wise to recognize that schedules for special events like Spring Break and Commencement may have to change as a result of this evolving situation.

We also realize some of these actions would affect things that matter a great deal to all of us. We can assure you we have used the best information, counsel, and inspiration to reach these conclusions. This is a challenge and opportunity that affects us all. Reducing risk of exposure is the best way to reduce the risk of serious illness—to ourselves and to our friends and families. Thank you for being here and working together through this new and unprecedented situation. Years from now we will all remember having been here now, and working through this together. I continue to believe our best efforts, faith, and petitions to the Lord will bless us as we work together. You are all in our prayers!

With kind regards,

Reed Wilcox

Note: Given shared objectives and similar thinking, this note reflects input with permission from Dr. Chris Eisgruber, President of Princeton University.