



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Higher Education Department

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR

Kate O'Neill, Cabinet Secretary

March 14, 2020

COVID-19 Briefing for Higher Education Institutions

On Wednesday, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and the New Mexico Department of Health issued a [public health order](#) prohibiting congregations of more than 100 people after announcing that four New Mexico residents tested presumptive positive for COVID-19, the first confirmed cases in the state. This order was issued out of an abundance of caution and is meant to maximize social distancing. The order requires canceling or rescheduling conferences, meetings, performances, and sporting events with an anticipated attendance of more than 100 people.

Yesterday, Gov. Lujan Grisham issued an [order closing all public pre-schools and K-12 schools](#) effective through April 3 and may be extended as conditions warrant. Schools will not be required to make up the missed instructional days at the end of the academic year. Public colleges and universities are not included in the order. However, the governor strongly urged regents and governing boards to move or extend spring breaks and shift educational and business services to online models to the greatest extent possible.

Below are procedures for keeping students, faculty, and staff healthy in the event of identified cases of COVID-19 in your school community. As there are no vaccines or pharmaceutical therapeutics currently available to treat COVID-19, prevention is key to mitigating community spread and keeping residents healthy. Please continue to refer to the [New Mexico Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for the most up to date information surrounding COVID-19.

This memo has been drafted to respond to some of our most frequently asked questions from educational leaders and to provide general policy guidance as we work with the U.S. Department of Education to determine how to best serve the educational needs of our students while keeping our communities healthy and safe.

The following topics will be addressed in this memo:

1. Higher Education Commission – Accreditation and Online Learning
2. Graduation
3. Dual Credit
4. Residence Halls – Housing and Student Meals
5. Points of Contact and Reporting Processes
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**Higher Education Commission
*Accreditation and Online Learning***

All higher education institutions must contact the Higher Learning Commission to notify them about the institution's intent to provide temporary online offerings. Visit their [website](#) to obtain a waiver. Additionally, earlier this week, all Higher Learning Commission institutions received an email with the [Institutional Status and Requirements](#) document showing their current status with the commission as it relates to distance delivery. The Higher Education Commission noted that it will be as flexible as possible within the U.S. Department of Education's requirements. If you have any questions or concerns, contact the [Higher Education Commission](#) directly at 800-621-7440.

Graduation

For students expecting to graduate this spring, ensure they are able to complete their coursework for a timely graduation. In addition, all higher education institutions are expected to work closely with students in education, nursing, other healthcare fields, and hard-to-fill, critical need, workforce areas to complete courses and fulfill graduation requirements. This may require working with the New Mexico Higher Education Department, the New Mexico Public Education Department, the New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium (NMNEC), and other organizations and agencies to make appropriate arrangements to substitute for clinical and practical hours. There are virtual labs, simulation robots, video simulations, and other creative, innovative ways to address hands-on requirements.

Higher education institutions may not know what form commencement ceremonies will take – remotely, postponement, etc. – and each institution will need to evaluate spring commencement ceremony options that protect public health and safety while still providing an experience for graduates and their guests.

Dual Credit

Please work with partner school districts and high schools to ensure that students can complete their dual credit coursework in a timely manner. If high school students participate in in-person classes on your campus or if the higher education institution faculty member teaches courses at partner school districts or high schools, please work collaboratively to institute online learning options for all student to the greatest extent possible. It is important that interruptions or modality changes in dual credit coursework do not delay a student's graduation or on-time semester completion.

If your higher education institution needs assistance in facilitating a dialogue surrounding dual credit coursework with school districts, high schools, or charter schools, please contact the New Mexico Higher Education Department at 505-476-8400.

Residence Halls *Housing and Student Meals*

Many higher education institutions across the nation have closed campuses, extended or moved spring break periods, or transitioned to online learning amid COVID-19. The New Mexico Higher Education Department recommends the following protocol during this time to ensure that all students have stable housing and regular meals:

- Ensure that the residence halls and other campus housing remains open in addition to essential student services
- Provide meals to students who remain on campus or in the area during the extended spring break and for the remainder of the semester
- Ensure that health and wellness centers, police and fire stations, and other essential student support services remain open during the extended spring break and for the remainder of the semester

Points of Contact and Reporting Processes

In the event that you have a confirmed case of COVID-19 in your higher education institution, please inform the New Mexico Department of Health at 505-827-0006 immediately. An identified case may include a student, member of faculty or staff, or family member.

Also, if any of the following are true for those individuals, call the New Mexico Department of Health at 505-827-0006:

- They have a fever, a cough, or shortness of breath, **and** within the 14 days before the symptoms started, they visited China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, **or** were in contact with a person known to have COVID-19.
- They do not have a fever, a cough, or shortness of breath, but they did travel to China, Iran, Italy, or South Korea, in the last 14 days, **or** were in contact with a person known to have COVID-19.

For general questions regarding COVID-19, please contact the New Mexico Department of Health's COVID-19 hotline at 855-600- 3453. You may share this number with students, staff, and faculty.

For general information regarding COVID-19, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Interim Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Persons with Potential COVID-19 Exposures](#).

Symptoms compatible with COVID-19, for the purpose of these recommendations, include subjective or measured fever, cough, or difficulty breathing.

Self-observation means people should remain alert for subjective fever, cough, or difficulty breathing. If they feel feverish or develop cough or difficulty breathing during the self-observation period, they should take their temperature, self-isolate, limit contact with others, and seek advice by telephone from a healthcare provider or their local health department to determine whether medical evaluation is needed.

Self-monitoring means people should monitor themselves for fever by taking their temperatures twice a day and remain alert for cough or difficulty breathing. If they feel feverish or develop measured fever, cough, or difficulty breathing during the self-monitoring period, they should self-isolate, limit contact with others, and seek advice by telephone from a healthcare provider or their local health department to determine whether medical evaluation is needed.

Active monitoring means that the state or local public health authority assumes responsibility for establishing regular communication with potentially exposed people to assess for the presence of fever, cough, or difficulty breathing. For people with high-risk exposures, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends this communication occurs at least once each day. The mode of communication can be determined by the state or local public health authority and may include telephone calls or any electronic or internet-based means of communication.

Cessation of normal operations means that the higher education institution closes for an extended period of time or dramatically shifts its service delivery model for an extended period of time. Dramatic service delivery model shifts could include moving to an all online format, closing large portions of the campus, and other significant changes.

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.

Close contact is defined as:

- Being within approximately six feet (two meters) of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time; close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a healthcare waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case
OR
- Having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)

Isolation means the separation of a person or group of people known or reasonably believed to be *infected with a communicable disease and potentially infectious* from those who are not infected to prevent spread of the communicable disease. Isolation for public health purposes may be voluntary or compelled by federal, state, or local public health order.

Public health orders are legally enforceable directives issued under the authority of a relevant federal, state, or local entity that, when applied to a person or group, may place restrictions on the activities undertaken by that person or group, potentially including movement restrictions or a requirement for monitoring by a public health authority, for the purposes of protecting the public's health. Federal, state, or local public health orders may be issued to enforce isolation, quarantine or conditional release.

The list of [quarantinable communicable diseases](#) for which federal public health orders are authorized is defined by Executive Order and includes "severe acute respiratory syndromes." COVID-19 meets the definition for "severe acute respiratory syndromes" as set forth in Executive Order 13295, as amended by Executive Order 13375 and 13674, and, therefore, is a federally quarantinable communicable disease. Additionally, please refer to Gov. Lujan Grisham's order declaring a [public health emergency](#).

Lectures with more than 100 students are exempted under Gov. Lujan Grisham's order; however, the governor strongly urged regents and governing boards to move or extend spring breaks and shift educational and business services to online models to the greatest extent possible. Complying with the order will also require higher education institutions to take all practical measures to limit crowds for activities. The New Mexico Department of Health also recommends suspending all volunteer activities involving high risk populations, e.g., seniors and individuals with weakened immune systems.

Quarantine in general means the separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been *exposed to a communicable disease but not yet symptomatic*, from others who have not been exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease.

Congregate settings are crowded public places where close contact with others may occur, such as shopping centers, movie theaters, and stadiums.

Social distancing means remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintaining distance (approximately six feet or two meters) from others when possible.

Higher Education Institution Closures

The board of regents and governing boards of New Mexico's higher education institutions have the authority to make decisions for their respective institutions. With that said, we strongly encourage you to adhere to public health and safety guidelines surrounding attendance monitoring, positive or presumptive tests, communications, travel, and telecommuting.

Attendance Monitoring

Institutions should monitor attendance patterns and inform the New Mexico Higher Education Department and the New Mexico Department of Health if they have had a significant decrease in attendance for students, faculty, and staff, especially due to an influenza-like illness.

Initial Response to Positive or Presumptive Tests

If a person connected with the higher education institution is exhibiting indicative symptoms, they should not be present at the college, university, or its facilities. Good hygiene practices should be used to protect all students, faculty, and staff.

If a person who has been at the higher education institution within the past 48 hours tests positive or has a presumptive test outcome, then the school administration should:

- Contact the New Mexico Department of Health's COVID-19 hotline at 505-827-0006 and the New Mexico Higher Education Department at 505-476-8400.
- Close the higher education institution to students, faculty, and staff for 24 hours.
- After 24 hours, begin disinfecting the facilities and keep it closed to other students, faculty, and staff for an additional 24 hours.
 - Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website for [Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#).
- Exclude the affected individual from attending class or any activities on campus immediately and for the next 14 days and until they are fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.
- Notify the New Mexico Higher Education Department and New Mexico Department of Health to discuss the situation and make decisions about whether an extended closure is warranted.
- To the greatest extent possible, allow excluded students to participate online or to take home independent work.

Communications with Students and Families

COVID-19 is causing widespread anxiety across the country and misinformation. The New Mexico Higher Education Department recommends frequent, transparent updates to students, parents, and guardians that share properly vetted information from trusted sources like the [New Mexico Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Travel and Telecommuting

Many students, faculty, and staff will be traveling during spring break. Gov. Lujan Grisham is committed to mitigating the widespread community transmission of COVID-19 by enforcing self-isolation recommendations among individuals known to have traveled. Please work with your students, faculty, and staff in limiting the spread of COVID-19 by acquainting them with the New Mexico Department of Health's [travel recommendations](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends avoiding all non-essential travel.

Gov. Lujan Grisham has instructed non-essential employees working for the State of New Mexico work from home if possible, also known as telecommuting. Additionally, the State has halted out-of-state travel by state employees. The New Mexico Higher Education Department encourages schools, governments, and private companies to enact similar policies and guidelines for employees.

Procedures for Cessation of Normal Operations

If a higher education institution closes due to an occurrence of COVID-19 and there is evidence of community spread of the virus, consult the New Mexico Department of Education and New Mexico Higher Education Department to discuss whether an extended closure is warranted.

Other considerations upon review with the New Mexico Department of Health:

- If a confirmed case has no epidemiological link to travel or a known case then that increases the likelihood of a closure recommendation. The local epidemiological context, such as the number of cases, severity and phase of the outbreak, and identifying where most of the transmission is occurring, should be considered before making the decision to close or dismiss a school.
 - Making the decision for extended closure will require evaluating the potential health benefit of reducing transmission.
 - Making the decision to close an entire higher education institution will involve guidance from the New Mexico Department of Health and the state epidemiologist and will be made on a case by case basis.

Reopening a Higher Education Institution

Consult with the New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico Higher Education Department regarding the decision to reopen a college, university, or other facility. A decision will be a jointly based on local conditions in the school, community, or state.

- It is recommended to close off areas and wait as long as practical before cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
 - Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website for [Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#).

- Plan to provide help, support, and mental and behavioral health services to students, faculty, and staff who may have had a family member, friend, or coworker who experienced severe illness or died from COVID-19.
- Educate faculty and staff to encourage students to wash their hands frequently, cover their cough or sneeze into their sleeve or tissue, and avoid contact with people who are coughing or sneezing. Place “wash your hands” and “cover your cough” posters throughout the school.
 - Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s website for [printable posters](#), [facts sheets](#), and [educational materials](#). Printable posters and information are also available in [Spanish](#).

Contact and Key Information

Gov. Lujan Grisham and the New Mexico Higher Education is committed to ensuring that New Mexicans remain healthy and safe during this time. If any higher education institution has any question or concerns, please refer to the following information.

State of New Mexico: One Stop Shop

<http://www.newmexico.gov/>

COVID-19 Information Hotline: 833-551-0518

- Please use the number above if you have questions about school closures, job issues, general state services, etc.

New Mexico Department of Health

<https://cv.nmhealth.org/>

COVID-19 Health Hotline: 855-600-3453

- Please use the number above if you have **HEALTH** related questions about COVID-19.

New Mexico Higher Education Department

<https://hed.state.nm.us/>

Telephone: 505-476-8400

Office of the Governor

<https://www.governor.state.nm.us/>

Telephone: 505-476-2200