



Office of the President

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March 4, 2020

To: UW System Chancellors

Cc: UW System Cabinet, UW System colleagues  
UW System Emergency Operation Center

Fr: UW System President Ray Cross

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ray Cross'.

Re: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preparedness

The safety of our students, faculty, staff, and communities is our top priority in the UW System, and the expanding coronavirus issue presents new challenges for us all. I want to thank everyone for the work our campus teams are doing to address this.

Given the rapidly changing landscape of the coronavirus situation, it is important that we have a clear understanding of our policies and anticipated actions. The UW System's Emergency Operation Center (EOC), which includes a team of health, risk, international security, emergency management, legal counsel and communication experts, has launched a website to provide information on the latest coronavirus developments, particularly as they relate to the UW System. The site will provide regular updates and/or new information, as needed. You can find the website at [www.wisconsin.edu/coronavirus](http://www.wisconsin.edu/coronavirus). We encourage you to share this website as a resource.

Going forward, the EOC has established two sub-teams to address questions and policy issues related to the coronavirus. One sub-team will be dedicated to human resources issues and the other to finance/travel reimbursement.

To provide context for the actions we are taking, here is a summary of recent events. On Feb. 28, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) raised its travel warning levels for Italy and South Korea, expanding beyond its earlier warnings for China, where the coronavirus apparently originated. With prudent caution, UW campus teams moved rapidly to notify and facilitate the return of over 200 students to the United States.

On March 1, the CDC issued further guidance suggesting higher education institutions bring back all students in study abroad programs to the United States. Several national higher education groups that include international education and security staff reviewed this CDC guidance as well as current CDC warning levels. The groups concluded that as the State Department and the CDC raise their warning levels, universities across the U.S. would bring students back from programs in the designated affected countries.

On March 2, the Wisconsin State Department of Health Services (DHS) sent Chancellors a memo asking that individuals “returning from countries with Level 2 or Level 3 Travel Health Notice” voluntarily self-quarantine. Accordingly, public health departments have started to reach out to campuses to identify these individuals.

According to Wisconsin statutes, county public health departments take the lead in addressing public health issues. These departments consult with DHS and the CDC, but they are responsible for leading any local response to potential or identified cases. UW health directors are already working with our local health department officials, and that collaboration will intensify if the virus spreads. The relationship with county health departments will be critical for our campus communities.

The UW System has been attentive to this issue from the early stages of the coronavirus problem. In February, the EOC shared UW-Platteville’s pandemic plan with all campuses and asked campuses to update their own plans accordingly. It is important these plans are reviewed immediately to consider a multitude of different scenarios that might present. Scenarios to consider include hosting events by utilizing technology rather than in-person, dealing with academic requirements potentially in jeopardy if students become subject to isolation, and how campuses will best provide support to our UW communities.

This is a rapidly changing challenge for all of us. Working together, we will continue our commitment to providing a safe and stable learning environment for our students, faculty, and staff.