

AS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC continues to disrupt higher education across the country, many colleges and universities made the decision to reopen their campuses for the fall 2020 semester. The Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN) and the Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and 21st Century Health Threats of the National Academies recently released a rapid expert consultation that presents 10 lessons learned about COVID-19 testing strategies on college campuses. These lessons can be used for planning for the spring 2021 semester and beyond.

- 1. Testing as one component of a mitigation strategy based on a comprehensive, coherent plan with redundancies.** Additional mitigation efforts such as contact tracing, use of personal protective equipment, wastewater surveillance, and messaging to promote the adoption of protective behaviors need to be considered as part of a comprehensive response.
- 2. One size does not fit all.** Strategies are best chosen to match the needs and circumstances of the particular institution. Programs need to be tailored. For example, whether a school is a commuter versus a non-commuter school, or urban versus rural, the degree to which programming is remote or in-person, the design of residence halls and dining facilities, and the prevalence and rate of transmission of COVID-19 in that particular area, will all inform how testing programs can be optimally designed.
- 3. Engaged leadership at the highest levels, interdisciplinary teams, and coordination across groups.** Many universities reported holding consistent, frequent virtual meetings for sharing best practices and planning.
- 4. Collaboration with local public health authorities and engagement with partners.** Collaboration and partnership can allow for leveraging of resources and sharing of best practices.
- 5. Routine collection and daily analysis of data to guide decision making, including dynamic prioritization of populations and testing frequency.** Surveys and focus groups of the campus community can inform understanding of the testing experience, compliance with mitigation behaviors, and challenges and barriers to participation. Uncertainty surrounding the pandemic necessitates consistent gathering of information to inform decision making.
- 6. Quick response to a positive test—communicating results and supporting isolation of positive individuals and quarantine of close contacts—to prevent further transmission of the virus.** Speed is critical, and offering care and assistance to those who test positive to get safely isolated within hours, not days, has shown to be effective at reducing transmission.

- 7. Adaptability and flexibility to implement different mitigation strategies as circumstances change.** Strategies will need to continue to adapt as new technology and new information become available and as the nature and scope of outbreaks change.
- 8. Adoption of an information technology infrastructure that respects data transparency and privacy while rapidly providing accurate information.** A convenient and consistent user interface for test registration, check-in, and results delivery is important. Establishing an efficient data system sufficient to inform timely decision making may require significant changes to existing IT systems.
- 9. Communication as an essential piece of the testing strategy.** Public facing dashboards and forums for sharing information such as weekly town hall discussions are examples of ways to share information with students, faculty, staff, and the public.
- 10. Engagement with the university and community, including students, in the development and implementation of the testing strategy and a culture of shared responsibility.** Participation in COVID-19 response activities may provide opportunities for experiential learning or internships. Building shared responsibility for prevention across the entire campus community in conjunction with the testing strategy is critical.

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