March 4, 2020

Dear UW-River Falls Campus Community:

UW-River Falls is at all times committed to ensuring the health and safety of our students and employees. This commitment has been especially heightened in recent weeks and days, as we strive to address concerns related to the ways that the new coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, could impact our campus. This complex and rapidly evolving outbreak has been the subject of much media attention and regular scrutiny on the part of the local, state and federal health offices. The University of Wisconsin System Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the UWRF EOC have been active since late January, monitoring the situation.

The UW System has launched a central website intended to be a clearinghouse for all relevant guidance. The UW System EOC is working to address, in particular, questions and policy issues related to human resources and finance/travel reimbursements. This information and other guidance was shared in a letter from President Ray Cross sent to all UW Chancellors earlier today.

I am grateful to the members of our Emergency Management Team, those serving on our EOC, the local subject matter experts and all others on our campus who’ve taken proactive steps to keep our community safe, ensure sound preparation and, in consultation with public health authorities, process guidance and recommendations. With that in mind, I am sharing the following important updates jointly written from the EOC, Office of International Education and Student Health and Counseling. The purpose of the following information is hopefully to answer some of the questions that may be arising.

**UWRF Emergency Operations Center**

Our EOC has been meeting regularly since the initial outbreak. While they hopefully will not become necessary, all UWRF emergency and pandemic plans are up to date and ready to be activated, should the need to take such steps arise. The EOC is also in constant communication with local public health departments, who are working with area health clinics, hospitals and Emergency Medical Services to be sure they are prepared should they have a suspected or confirmed case.

**Travel**

We are following Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) guidance as well as the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations regarding university travel and study abroad. The latest guidance indicates that travelers returning or arriving from countries with a CDC Level 3 Travel Health Notice related to this coronavirus voluntarily self-quarantine for 14 days and that those returning from a Level 2 country self-monitor and limit interactions with others for 14 days upon arrival in the US.

**Study abroad**

In collaboration with the EOC and university leadership, the Office of International Education has been reaching out to all students, faculty and staff currently on approved education abroad programs to ensure their safety and to inform them of the state and federal guidance. At this point in time, education abroad courses scheduled for Spring Break will proceed, however the university will continue to monitor the situation and make appropriate decisions on upcoming education abroad courses as needed.

**Personal travel**
If employees or students are considering traveling abroad on their own, it is recommended you maintain awareness of the global situation. Please check with the Department of State and the Centers for Disease Control sites for specific travel guidelines and restrictions, including different regulations at specific countries or areas you may be visiting. Also check the U.S. Consulate web page for the country or countries you are planning to visit for country-specific information. Any employees or students who are returning or arriving from personal travel to any of the restricted countries, please contact your local public health department. Please note that cases of COVID-19 are being increasingly being identified in locations around the world and across the US. Exposure to the virus is no longer strictly limited to travel to certain foreign countries.

Confession or events for university business
Individuals planning to attend conferences or events on behalf of the university should consider receiving confirmation in advance that the event will be held. Escalating concerns over the possible spread of COVID-19 in large groups has resulted in numerous cancellations.

Risk and prevention
Please know that right now, the risk for contracting COVID-19 in the US is still very low. Persons are still much more likely to be at risk for influenza. Hence, we continue to recommend preventive measures (see below), including vaccination against influenza. Check with your health care provider about getting a flu shot. If you do have influenza-like symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, body aches and fatigue, contact your primary care provider and be sure to share any recent travel history or possible exposure.

If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with preventive wellness efforts to avoid this and other viruses. These include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

Important reminder:
- If you have traveled and become ill (such as fever, cough and/or difficulty breathing), seek medical advice. Call ahead before going to a doctor’s office or emergency room. Tell them about your recent travel.

Personal protective equipment
Regarding surgical masks, these have not been shown to prevent persons wearing them from getting sick, so these are not recommended. The U.S. Surgeon General has also reminded the public that the currently limited supplies of masks should be reserved for our health care workers, who indeed are at greatest risk.

Preparing for a pandemic
Government authorities such as the Department of Homeland Security highly recommend that persons be prepared for emergencies such as pandemics or natural disasters and keep supply of needed items on hand.

Answers to questions related to COVID-19 or influenza can be found at CDC.gov. Clarifying questions can be directed to Student Health and Counseling at 715-425-3293. Please continue to watch your UWRF email for updates. Thank you for all you are doing to help keep our campus and community healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Dean

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